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THE ELDER
MISS
AINSBOROUGH

by

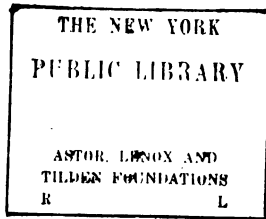
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"Hedwig and Ada volunteered to sit for him, and their contrasting beauty, added to the intelligence the professional model rarely possessed, made them ideal models."—Page 125.

THE ELDER MISS AINSBOROUGH

BY
MARION AMES TAGGART

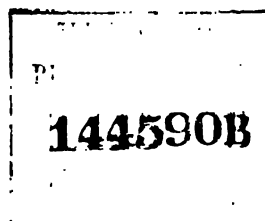


NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
BENZIGER BROTHERS

PUBLISHERS OF BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE

1915

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THE ELDER MISS AINSBOROUGH

"We were two sisters of one race;
She was the fairest in the face."

CHAPTER I

THE old Ainsborough homestead was too large, too dignified—too lonely also—to be the home of but two sisters. Yet these were all that was left of the solid New England family, with roots reaching back to the beginnings of Massachusetts Bay colony. It had a goodly record of honorable sons, who had borne their part in the colonial counsels, and helped valiantly make the colony into part of a young nation, shedding their blood freely in the war for independence, and later, with the lusty vigor of an unquenchable stock, had survived in the persons of male descendants to sit high

in the Senate and State legislatures of the youthful nation thus formed. But at last this hardiness had been exhausted, and the Ainsboroughs, dwindling away as New England families have done, existed but in two daughters, half sisters, with ten years' difference in age between them. The elder Miss Ainsborough, the Miss Ainsborough proper, was so to her neighbors but by the right of primogeniture, grudgingly admitted; in reality she was regarded as the improper Miss Ainsborough, or rather, not to use a word conveying a totally misleading impression, improperly Miss Ainsborough, an interloper.

This was because her father, Josiah Ainsborough, as he was called after three generations of progenitors, having been sent abroad in his early twenties to see the world—after the German fashion of giving “wander years” to a youth—had still further and more reprehensibly followed German fashions, for he had fallen in love with and married a dark-haired, dark-eyed South German girl, and had

brought home with him a wife whose English never got to the point of putting the verbs into the right place in her sentences, and who outraged the Congregational decency of the community by adhering to her inherited faith and practice in the Old Religion. Not only that, but when her baby daughter was born she was baptized Hedwig in the faith of her mother, and presented to her world the shocking spectacle of a born Ainsborough an adherent of Rome, albeit one not yet guilty of the offense by her own will.

Josiah Ainsborough loved his simple, womanly, devoted foreign wife, and stood between her and the misapprehension of her neighbors. Before there had been time to test whether his love would survive the strain of the separation this involved, and the difference in education, inherited prejudices, and taste between him and the Frau Hedwig, she died, leaving him the care of little Hedwig, not much past her first year.

Mr. Ainsborough was an honorable man;

a promise meant to him not a pacifying form of words, but a pledge to be fulfilled. He had said that Hedwig should be a Catholic, and a Catholic he set out to make her, by proxy, not being competent for the task himself. The little girl was sent away to a convent when she was but six years old, and there she remained, with brief visits to her home during the vacations, until her twentieth year; long enough, and with these visits brief enough, to make her feel herself and be regarded as a stranger among her kindred and acquaintances; long enough, too, to allow her father to marry again, this time suitably, according to the town verdict, espousing the daughter of Judge Appleton, of a town not far away; a pretty, blonde creature, entirely self-centered, and contrasting as strongly as possible with the first Mrs. Ainsborough, with her dark coloring, strong frame, and stronger heart. Whether Josiah Ainsborough remembered and repented too late the difference between the two women he had chosen no one

would ever know from him. He "waited by inches," as the women said, on the peevish, weak creature he had married until the latent consumption always threatening her, developed; he helped her, while delaying her, dying for five weary years. Then she too left him, and her little daughter, a pretty creature of seven, with no inconvenient claim to wrest her from her father's arms.

Hedwig Ainsborough came home to see the stepmother whom she had scarcely known, and had little reason to love, laid in the graveyard on the slope of the hill, behind the Congregational meeting-house; her own mother slept in the little Catholic cemetery of a larger town eight miles distant, and Hedwig thought jealously that it was beside the second wife her father would lie at last to wait the day of waking.

Though Hedwig had not been able to care for the second Mrs. Ainsborough, she adored her little sister without jealousy, and with no consciousness of the "step" in their kinship,

pouring out upon her the wealth of love in a heart capable of containing more affection than most natures can understand, and hungering for an object which should be really her own on which to bestow it.

Little Adaline—Ada in daily speech—was as different from her sister as had been their mothers from each other. Hedwig was not a pretty girl; dark skinned, with warm brown eyes, a full, strong mouth, and health rather than grace in her figure, she looked trusty, kind, sensible, but could not have been accused of beauty, though a keener observer than most that her native town boasted would have seen that in middle life it would be she and not little Ada who would be handsome. Ada was golden haired, blue eyed, a very thistledown child, full of grace and airy lightness of motion. She had dainty, caressing ways, and passed for sweetly affectionate and dependent. Dependent she was, and she was yet too young for any one but her angular great-aunt, Huldah Ainsborough, to have discovered that her

pretty ways were usually assumed only to cajole, and when she had a point to gain.

With her big sister Ada soon discovered that it was not necessary to coax for favors; seventeen-year-old Hedwig was her abject slave, and in the ten days passed by the elder at home—the period covering the time of her step-mother's death and burial—Ada established a dominion over her that in years never for an instant relaxed its power again. Hedwig begged to be allowed to stay at home, giving up her cherished hopes of graduating honors, and the extended course she was taking, to assume the charge of her father's house, and the care of her golden-haired darling. But Mr. Ainsborough would not consent to this arrangement, and Hedwig drove sobbing to the station, seeing through a mist of tears as she looked back Ada in her little black gown, buoyantly chasing butterflies, not cast down by the loss of her mother, nor this newer deprivation of her devoted sister.

One of the competent unattached women

abounding in New England came to preside over Josiah Ainsborough's household, and Ada went to and from the village school for three years. And then, suddenly, on the very night Hedwig graduated in her distant convent school, her father died. Hedwig hastened home, bowed beneath the contrast of this return and the home-coming of which she had dreamed, when, laden with the laurels of her post-graduate course, she should arrive to take her place as Miss Ainsborough, and devote herself to her father and Ada. For Hedwig had known, though no words had ever told her so, that she was nearest and dearest of all earthly objects to the good father whose cold face could now wear no smile of welcome for her.

The first month at home passed in the sorrowful confusion of adjusting the details of the new life, mastering business statements that were confusing to the convent-bred girl, but for which she showed a common-sense aptitude delightful to the old lawyer who was her father's executor under the will and her grand-

father's friend. Mr. Ainsborough had left his property equally divided between his daughters, but Hedwig had a lesser total than Ada, whose mother had a larger portion than the first Mrs. Ainsborough. At the end of two months Ada delightedly found herself the virtual mistress of a household whose head was a girl who was, for that one year only, exactly twice her age, but whose native simplicity and unselfishness made her wonderfully easily managed by the small girl who was in many ways her elder. Ada convinced Hedwig with no difficulty that the long walk to and from school was too much for her, and the teacher far less competent to educate her thoroughly than the ambitious young graduate whose hard-earned knowledge seemed out of place in the life opening before her. Hedwig took Ada under her instruction, and was blind to the ways by which the cajoling witch with the innocent eyes managed to slip out of systematic work and unpleasant tasks.

The widow Lemp, the now deposed house-

keeper, had been deaf to Ada's bird voice, and had set her daily duties about the house, in the old-fashioned notion that children must early be trained to domesticity; duties her father's authority, dreadfully enforcing the widow's, had compelled Ada to perform. Now all this was over; Hedwig, though she had herself been docile to womanly training during her early, brief childhood at home, could not bear to see her pet dragging her soft limbs to hateful dusting, nor wrinkling her pretty face over despised seams when all out-doors beckoned her to play with the other little creatures. So Ada escaped burdens, and because she was peevish only if crossed, and was rarely crossed, Hedwig felt sure her little sister was loving her with a devotion differing in kind, but not degree, from her passionate love for Ada.

Hedwig did not make friends in Fenford; she was a stranger, regarded as partly an alien, with her imported name, coloring, and religion. Ada was much petted; she was looked upon as the real Ainsborough, and though it was a com-

munity in which over-indulgence of children was frowned upon, Hedwig's self-effacement in favor of the child, considering all things, seemed but suitable to the on-lookers, and they constituted the entire village. Only great-aunt Huldah disapproved; in her Hedwig had a loyal admirer, and defender against herself. "Don't tell me," said the keen-eyed old lady decisively. "Hedwig may be German, and she may be too dark to be pretty, and she may be a Catholic, and a hundred other things different from the rest of us, but she's about the best girl I know, and she's got a longing for love, and a way of looking at herself through the small end of the spy glass that's going to do a sight of mischief. Ada's little, and pretty enough, though she won't be near so good looking as Hedwig when she's middle aged, but she's got about as much heart as a corn-silk tassel. Hedwig's going to spoil her, and that wouldn't be so much matter if that was the worst of it. But she's going to pour all that big heart of hers out on that little yellow but-

terfly, and when it's too late she won't have so much as a thank you out of her life left for herself. Ada ain't clear Ainsborough, as you all are so fond of saying; we ain't so heartless, if we don't say much. She's all Plummer—her mother's mother was a Plummer—and they're all as shallow as shallow. Don't tell me!"

Aunt Huldah got Hedwig up to spend the day with her at the farm where she lived solitary; it took repeated efforts to bring it about, for she had not asked Ada, and Hedwig was not willing to leave the child alone. But at last respect for her great aunt's thinning gray locks forced Hedwig into yielding and she went, taking the ruffles of Ada's dainty white dimity to hem as she sat like a staid old lady under Aunt Huldah's elms.

Aunt Huldah glanced often at the strong, sweet face bent contentedly over the ruffling, and each time she did so her keen eyes softened into their rare expression of love. Hedwig did not know how close she lay to the old lady's

affections, veiled as they were by her inherited habit of concealment, nor had she yet reached the point when it mattered to her greatly what other love she had, satisfied as she was with playing mother and housewife. "You don't get much pleasure for a young girl just out of school, Hedwig, it appears to me," said Aunt Huldah at last after several such glances. "I don't want you should be too shut up with your housekeeping."

"I don't want any better fun than to be shut up with that housekeeping, Aunt Huldah," said Hedwig, smiling happily. "If only I can do my duty by it, and make Ada perfectly happy, life won't hold for me an unsatisfied desire."

"M-m," said Aunt Huldah through her closed lips, with an unspellable, but most significant murmur. "Seems to me you're way behind your years in what you know about desires, and what life holds. I guess you haven't seen enough of life to realize much about what it has to offer, and what you might miss. I'd

like to see you with young companions of your own age, dancing and picnicking, and by and by marrying. Ada's all right for a little while, but half-sisters ain't like little children of your own."

"I don't want to marry, Aunt Huldah," cried Hedwig half indignantly. "Ada and I are not half-sisters, except legally; in reality we're more fully sisters than is usual."

"If you were sisters doubly on both sides, boiled down, and skimmed off, it wouldn't be any less true that you ought to think of yourself once in a while," said Aunt Huldah.

"See here, Hedwig, you haven't any right to spoil that child, and you're in a fair way to doing it."

"Loving her won't spoil her, Auntie," laughed Hedwig proudly. "She is so sweet and clinging, the more you love her the more she will do for you, and love back again. It would be different if she weren't the darling little creature she is; if she were selfish or horrid like so many children I should feel that I must

be strict with her; I am so glad and grateful for her loveliness of soul and face, and that I can pet her all I want to without feeling pricks of conscience."

Outspoken Aunt Huldah could be discreet when she liked; she did not make the cruel mistake of disparaging her idol to Hedwig, but satisfied herself by saying: "I'd be the last one to want to make you see flaws in human beings, Hedwig, for it's a comfort to believe in them, and faith goes quick enough. But I never saw any human being yet that was clear angel, and selfishness is about the commonest and the meanest trait I know of. I just want to tell you that I've seen considerable in my time of the harm good women do corrupting others."

"What do you mean, Aunt Huldah?" cried Hedwig.

"I mean these unselfish, devoted creatures that just lay down and turn all their families into so many juggernaut cars. They're mostly women—I never met but one man that

did it, and his wife was the most shallow, selfish, no-account creature you ever saw—and they're so ready to immolate themselves they just breed a whole houseful of selfish tyrants. You can't blame the families, either; they really ain't conscious they are so mean; they get into the way of being bowed down to, and served, and first thing any one knows—and they never know—they're a pack of good-for-nothings."

"Am I going to be that kind, Aunt Huldah?" asked Hedwig, trying to keep her eyes from dancing with amusement.


"Oh, you don't think it's possible, I see that, but children are easily warped, Hedwig, and you'd better turn over a new leaf with Ada," said her great-aunt. "I see just how it's going. You never think of yourself, and you don't teach her to think of you. Mothers like that do a lot of harm, and the worst of it is they feel certain to the very end that they've been the best sort of mothers, because they've been devoted. Devotion is like most things; it needs mixing with sense. I honestly think one such

woman in a family is likely to do more harm than six selfish ones. You mark my words, Hedwig Ainsborough; injustice never leads to good, and it takes a real strong, balanced mind to be just to yourself; it's lots easier to give in than to stand up for square dealing in your own case. If you don't stop yielding to Ada in everything, and only living to give her pleasure, or save her some annoyance, first thing you know she'll think you haven't any true right to be living at all, and she'll get to feeling next step that the whole world ought to turn out for her. The world don't do much turning out; it can't very well, because there's the rest of the planets. I guess we've got to give way to the solar system, and it's just as well to get used to doing it when we're young. You haven't any right to spoil Ada, Hedwig, just because you think she's pretty, and you love her."

"Why I wouldn't spoil her for all the world, Aunt Huldah," cried Hedwig. "I don't believe I could, because she's so loving; you know no one who is loving can be selfish. And isn't

she pretty? You don't know what a joy it is to me to brush her lovely golden hair, and see how white her forehead is when she cuddles up beside my brown face! And she is really the most graceful, fairy-like little thing! Oh, I won't spoil her, dear Auntie; my blessed little pet and I understand each other! When I'm old and ugly—and you know I'm certain to be both—Ada will prove how right I was by taking care of me, and sharing all her happiness with me, for of course she will be so beautiful that the very nicest things are coming to her, and ugly, brown Hedwig will be perfectly happy in seeing it."

"Ugly brown Hedwig," said her great-aunt later, as she absently stroked Miss Giddy, the cat, and watched her niece's swift, free gait as she disappeared over the hill. "Ugly brown Hedwig indeed! She'll be a noble-looking woman when she's older; she's coming into her good looks every day. It took her a while to grow up to her features, for I must say she wasn't a pretty child. But I'd a lot rather



have her face than that pink and white baby's she's so fond of. I declare it seems a pity the way women do put their affection on such objects, and the bigger-hearted they are the harder it is to see the snip of a thing they're set on! Ada take care of her when she's old! I think I see her, and she clear Plummer! But how in the world should Hedwig know about the Plummers? Land sakes, the poor child'll learn fast enough what they're capable of, if I can read signs. I only hope what I said'll do more good, and she'll think it over more'n she seemed to. I believe I think more of Hedwig than I ever did of my other nieces. Miss Giddy, if you don't stop going round after your tail you'll live up to your name more'n is pleasant; ain't you ashamed, and you with four kittens as big as you are, 'most!"

With which apostrophe to the unabashed young cat, Aunt Huldah, who had fallen into the habit of conversing with herself and her dumb companion, went in and shut the door.

CHAPTER II

HEDWIG was very like her kind. Having protested to Aunt Huldah her certainty of being right she proceeded to wonder when she was quite alone in her own white chamber if after all she could be wrong. It would be such a tragic matter if she, to whom had been confided the care of such a rare nature as Ada's, should be false to her trust, and, from whatever motive, fail to bring out all its noble possibilities.

Her pillow whispered to her, more softly and gently than Aunt Huldah had spoken, that she shrank from correcting Ada to such an extent that she might easily be doing the child injustice, and she fell asleep resolving to be more faithful in the future. The result of her resolution was a week of misery to both sisters, in which Ada was sullen, and finally downright

cross under new restrictions, and Hedwig wretched in her Spartan virtue. At the end of that week a bad sore throat brought Ada into a state in which coddling was the delightful form under which duty presented itself, and when the little girl was well again Hedwig unblushingly abandoned her new principles, slipping back into the dear old way of trusting to Ada's natural tendencies to keep her from evil, and only fulfilling her part by loving the treasure given her as she should. Indeed, with the logic of a loving woman, Hedwig found new reasons for indulging Ada in that she had tried for a short time to mold her by more stringent methods.

And thus five years passed by, and Ada was a child no longer, for at fifteen, though she was still the fairy-like, tiny creature nature had fashioned her to be, she was a maiden whose feet had not loitered a moment, not even long enough to be reluctant, at the point where the brook and river meet.

Hedwig was rather in the position to-

ward her little sister of the delightful pair in "Rudder Grange," who had not noticed that the child they had taken from the orphan asylum to serve them had grown up until the inevitable lover began to lean over their front gate, wooing Pomona in the dusk. Ada glided quite unobserved by Hedwig from the period when the Fenford boys were asked to her parties to play games, and stood about forlornly by themselves until supper-time, to that in which the same boys, quite as self-conscious, but considerably longer, came to ask "Miss Ada" to drive with them to parties in the neighboring towns. They escorted her from Fenford gatherings, or took her walking in secluded country by-ways where nothing could have induced either of the pair to wander alone, or, like Pomona's admirers, hung over the Ainsborough gate, or lingered under the spreading elms. From all these symptoms Hedwig saw dimly that Ada was getting older, but the full knowledge of the loss of her little girl had not yet been forced upon her.

Hedwig herself, at twenty-five, began to feel almost middle-aged. There were no admirers in her case; there never had been in the same way the boys flocked around Ada, every one of whom was heartbroken by her for a greater or shorter length of time, and all of whom she flouted with a scientific accuracy as to what would produce the most desperate state of mind, worthy of many more years than she boasted. But Hedwig, though she had been favored with the passing regard of one or two, did not flout, tantalize, and draw her suitors on; she was totally unconscious of them, and her indifference was too kind and friendly to be less than absolutely sincere, so the young men who were wise enough to recognize her worth, seeing that she was not for them, sensibly loved and married more pliant lassies, and Hedwig saw them leave her without knowing that she had silently prevented possibilities of what constitutes happiness for the majority of women.

The old minister who had been called to the

Fenford Congregational church when Josiah Ainsborough's father was one of its deacons was getting feeble, and the congregation decided that he must have an assistant. The permanent minister who was to fill this position, with the certainty of ultimate complete charge of the "society" was not easy to choose; Fenford felt that he must have many qualities, and thus far their candidates had not united them all in one person. So for one summer, the summer after Ada was fifteen, a young divinity student, newly ordained, came to lighten Mr. Bliss' labors until the autumn. He was a pale youth—"interesting" the girls voted him—who looked as though he wrote poetry when he should have slept, and whose complexion argued ill for the pastry of the seminary boarding-house he had just quitted. Abner Alonzo Read he was named, but he preferred being called Alonzo; the Fenford boys, who found his immediate success with the girls a trifle trying, dubbed him: "Aye, Aye, sir."

Anything more serious than this young apostle it would be difficult to imagine; the Fenford girls soon discovered that frivolity, and the harmless coquetries by which they usually attracted, were worse than useless when practised on him. He lent a book on the errors of Rome to Hedwig when he had been in Fenford precisely six days, and begged her, almost with tears, to read it carefully and prayerfully, and come to him with the questions he was sure it would awaken. Hedwig, returning it, gently accepted his invitation, and he was so grieved at being unequal to meeting these questions—which were not of the nature he anticipated—that she could not make up her mind to hurting him further, and left him in peace, though he never saw her during his stay in Fenford without an uneasy consciousness that he had failed in his first opportunity to “snatch a brand from the burning.”

The Reverend Alonzo was asked to tea constantly by kind mothers, whose daughters brought forth specimens of their cooking, un-

til what was left of the clerical digestion was seriously impaired. They artlessly revealed before him their ardor for souls, and keen interest in missions, home and foreign.

Ada was not one of these; she did not ask Hedwig to invite her young pastor to tea; she did not offer to lend him books, nor did she begin to take an interest in serious things. On the contrary she wore rather more than less floating ribbons, and deliriously dainty gowns, and fluffed her hair—prettier even than in her childhood in its golden softness—in still more worldly, and, incidentally, becoming ways. And then she contrived to be frequently within range of the Alonzonian vision, elaborately unconscious the while of its growing tendency to rest upon her.

There came a Sunday at last when the Reverend Alonzo preached a sermon on the danger of delaying conversion, announcing his text as: "From Ezra tenth, fourth. 'Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it!'" The

day was oppressive, and the congregation—nearly all of which had been converted safely long before—voted coming out of church that the sermon was decidedly long and dull. Unconverted Ada, sitting well up in front, under the direct range of the preacher's eye from the pulpit, had not seemed to find it so. Dressed in white, ribbons, hat, floating gown and all, with only a yellow rose, her own yellow hair, and the soft color in her cheeks to intensify the purity of her garb, she raised her childlike eyes to the speaker's face, gradually ceasing to wave her white fan, and at last bending her pretty head forward, and hiding her face in her flimsy handkerchief.

What young apostle would not have felt his heart leap at this proof of the power of his words? Abner Alonzo Read knew that this lovely, innocent young creature was still among the unregenerate, knew too that she was under the influence of her elder sister, who so far from furthering her conversion might reasonably be assumed to be trying to draw

the little snowy thing under the scarlet mantle of the Woman of the Apocalypse—Rome. So his heart leaped with double fervor as he saw her bow her head, evincing signs of tears, and he hoped that his lips might be touched with a coal from the altar, though the immediate result was to make his mind wander from his theme, and his sermon grow duller.

The next day Ada, with all her ribbons laid aside, her hair arranged in a subdued, though still becoming manner, sought the young minister in his study. It was the beginning of many such visits, for, though she was humble, gentle, meekly anxious to be converted, she discovered many difficulties in her path, all of which she brought to the Reverend Alonzo to be smoothed away.

Hedwig knew of these communings with a heavy heart, not because she dreamed of fearing that "little Ada" might become interested too deeply in the minister, but because it had been the wish of her heart to lead her darling toward her own religion, and had rejoiced in

her indifference to the influences from which Hedwig—keeping to the injunction of her father's will in regard to Ada, as he had fulfilled his pledge to her mother in regard to her own training—had not felt she could honorably withdraw her.

"Ada has told me that she wished to join the Church, Aunt Huldah," said Hedwig sorrowfully one day in August to her relative who had driven down to bring her a dozen glasses of her new blackberry jam.

"M-m," said Aunt Huldah, looking over her spectacles, "and you're sorry, I see! Always hoped she'd follow you in the end, I suppose. Natural too, since you believe you're right, and are so fond of the girl. You know, Hedwig, I don't know much about your Church, but you do know I don't hold with them who are forever'n the day after abusing it. Seems queer to me Christians can take such a sight of comfort out of thinking the biggest and oldest sect is so dreadful; I'd rather think God Almighty did His work better'n that. How-

ever, if I hadn't known your mother and you I might feel different, though I ain't inclined by nature to keep picking at things. Of course I couldn't turn Catholic; I was brought up Methodist, and my knees are too stiff—as well as my mind—to get into new positions. But I'll say one thing for it; it can train good women. As to Ada, don't you worry about her. She wouldn't ever be a Catholic any more'n she'd be a—well, I don't know what! Not unless you went over to live where Catholics were more set by than they are here. And it isn't joining the Church that's taking up Ada—it's the minister! She thinks it will be a feather in her cap to have snared him.”

“Aunt Huldah!” cried Hedwig, flushing indignantly, all her love for Ada, her sense of decency and reverence outraged at the same moment. “You shall not say, you shall not even think such things! Ada! Pretending, talking of the most sacred things to that young man only to attract him! It would be monstrous in any one; no young girl could possibly

do such a thing, and Ada, innocent, childish Ada, least of all!"

"M-m," said Aunt Huldah. "As to thinking such things, my dear, how do you expect to stop me? And I don't mind what you say to me, because I knew just how it would strike you. But you'll see by and by! Ada may be fifteen, but she's no child, and the sacrilegious point of view wouldn't appeal to her; she couldn't see it. I tell you now she's been smarter than the rest of the girls, and a religious flirtation with a solemn young minister who don't know the A. B. C. of flirting, is great fun to such a bright girl as Ada. Remember what I told you, that's all."

Hedwig was left with perturbation of mind, in spite of her indignant denial of her aunt's injustice. When Ada came home from a long walk in the woods with the Reverend Alonzo, which had of late become a daily adjunct to her salvation, Hedwig drew her into her own room, and Ada willingly dropped down on the footstool at her feet while Hedwig took off

her hat, and kissed the unlined brow, so white and fair, and contradicting on its surface the possibility of guile lurking beneath it.

"It's so warm, Hedwig; you don't know how warm it is!" Ada said with something unusual in her voice.

"Did you go far, pet?" asked her sister. "Mr. Read is very good to take so much pains instructing you, dear; he must feel that you have no one at home to teach you your religion."

Ada made a little face. "You have forgotten more than he ever knew about religion, Hedlings. He's good, but he doesn't know what he's talking about."

Hedwig felt a distinct shock, the first Ada had ever caused her. "My dear," she cried protestingly, "you don't mean that, you know; you can't, because you're letting him instruct you, and you are taking a very serious step under his advice. My darling, don't be careless and childish in such a solemn matter."

Ada gave her sister what was the ghost of

a wink; just the delicate drooping of one eyelid. "That's where you are mistaken, dear old Solemnity," she said. "He isn't instructing me; I'm instructing him, only he doesn't dream it. And that's a Catholic word, anyhow; Protestants don't go for instructions in religion, as you do before you're confirmed. We go for advice, and to tell our experience. Now, Hedwig, I'm going to give you a surprise; I've been having experiences, but they're not religious, and I've no idea of joining the Church—not till I'm old and faded, anyway. But Alonzo is such a dear old darling, early-prophet kind of boy I had to get serious to make him see me."

"*Who* is?" gasped poor Hedwig.

Ada nodded hard. "Yes, I know," she said. "Alonzo is; that's what I call him now, and he calls me Ada, when he isn't inventing nicer names. He's forgotten all about my soul; he's more in love than you would imagine he could be. It's awfully nice."

"Ada, Ada, Ada!" cried poor Hedwig.

"Now, don't you make a fuss, darling, because it wouldn't do a bit of good, and I've always had my own way even in things I didn't care about like this. Of course I'm not yet sixteen, and you think I'm a baby, but I could give you cards and spades in lots of things, and beat you then! That doesn't sound serious-minded, does it? Don't you worry about me getting too religious; I'm going to have fun first."

"Do you mean—you can't mean that you—that this boy—" began Hedwig, when Ada interrupted her— "Are engaged?" she cried. "I mean just that. I wanted to tell you what I was up to, but I didn't dare till I felt sure it would be all right. He's been getting more and more in love with me every day, but we only settled things this afternoon. Of course we shan't be married for a while; I don't want to be."

"Married! You, my baby sister! And a minister's wife!" gasped Hedwig, struggling with the desire to become hysterical.

"Oh, you say that because you think of priests; ministers, you know, are all right to marry," said Ada airily. "I'm not much of a baby! The other girls were just crazy about him, but I was the only one with brains enough to get him. Won't they be furious!" And Ada laughed the low laugh of pure joy.

"Ada, you ought to be whipped, and put to bed!" cried Hedwig. "You are a naughty, scheming little girl, with no more idea of the seriousness of the matters with which you are playing than Aunt Huldah's Miss Giddy! I must see this poor, foolish boy and try to make him understand that you did not realize the harm you have done. He is older than you; I hope he will not feel it keenly. And, Ada, never again play with affection, nor be drawn into so much as a thought of marriage until you are able to love a man with all your heart and being, as a wife should love."

Ada had risen, and stood looking down on her elder with a queer mixture of amusement, condescension, and obstinacy in her eyes.

"You certainly must not see Alonzo," she said slowly, "except to give him your blessing, and kiss him like a good sister. For I am engaged to him, *engaged*, do you understand? And I haven't the least idea of giving him up. And why do you take it for granted I am not serious? Just because I like to think I got the best of the other girls, and made him love me? What do you suppose made me want him to fall in love with me? I never said I didn't care about him, you know. I was so gone the minute I saw him that I knew I'd die if I didn't get him. I got him," she added.

Honest Hedwig's face changed. A great wave of wonder, tenderness, the look of motherhood swept over it. She held her arms out, and Ada dropped into them, with a keen look first into the sweet face bent above her.

"My precious little sister!" cried Hedwig, kissing the bright hair which alone was visible of Ada. "Forgive me; I did not understand. I have thought of you as a little girl—you ought to be one still—and I took it for granted

you were playing. If you love him it is different. You shall never be separated from him, my pet, if I can help it, and you are sure of yourself. My little sister! How can I ever let any one have you? But you shall be happy, dear." And Ada, keeping her triumph carefully hidden, raised her face and returned Hedwig's kiss with warmth.

CHAPTER III

WHAT might have been called the betrothal supper took place on the following night. The invitation to tea which never had been given in the Ainsborough house to the young minister to attract him to its youngest daughter was now given to confirm him in his choice of her. Hedwig had not slept much on the night of Ada's startling revelation of her new dignity, but she was equal to superintending the setting forth of the finest china and most shining damask, and the preparation of luscious biscuits, salads, jellies and cake. Even she was not sufficiently an alien to disregard the traditions on these points of a solemn tea in Fenford.

The Reverend Abner Alonzo looked so boyish when he appeared that Hedwig could but wish that Ada had not been so ready to fulfil

the prophecy of the nickname given him by the Fenford boys, saying "Aye, Aye" so quickly to his important question. The dignity of his office, and his new engagement struggled for mastery with the youthful pride and delight of the latter; never had his eyes struck Hedwig as so light a blue, his hair so drabbish, nor his collars so unusual as now when she regarded him, no longer with the kindly indifference accorded a temporary resident of the village, but as her future brother and Ada's guardian.

The tea passed off with strained effort at ease and gaiety on her part and her guest's; Ada seemed quite unconscious of awkwardness, and chattered, and laughed so blithely that she not only helped Hedwig through three bad quarters of an hour, but called forth such looks of pride in her from her self-conscious betrothed that Hedwig's heart warmed to him a little.

When they had come back into the grave parlor, and were seated in the shaded light of

the bronze lamp, Alonzo spoke of the matter which had brought him to that fireside.

"It is very good of you," he said with a catch in his voice that was not unmanly, "to be willing to give me this sweet child, Miss Ainsborough."

"Hedwig," corrected Ada.

"Yes, of course, Hedwig," said Hedwig, smiling bravely at him, and ignoring the slightly professional appellation he had given Ada. "I really think it is good of me, too, Mr. Read——"

"Alonzo," interrupted Ada reprovingly.

"Alonzo," accepted Hedwig with an effort. "You can't possibly imagine how dear she is to me."

"Oh, Miss Ains—Hedwig!" remonstrated Alonzo in the tone of one who well knew.

"No," insisted Hedwig gently. "You can't even guess, because however fond you may be of her your affection is not yet part of the very fiber of your life. It is of mine. But I don't think we ought to talk of that;

I am ready to believe you love her very much, because I don't see how you can help loving her, and if she is as fond of you as she thinks she is I am willing to consent to your engagement——”

“Oh, Miss—Oh, Hedwig!” interrupted Alonzo again, but this time rapturously, and seizing Ada's hand.

“Provided,” said Hedwig, raising her own hand to check his emotion, “provided there is no talk of a too speedy marriage, and that you see your way to giving Ada the kind of home she will require.”

“As to marriage,” said Alonzo, blushing ecstatically over the word, though Ada heard it nonchalantly, “I would not be a man if I did not want to marry her to-morrow—to-night. But she is young——”

“Yes,” said Hedwig, interrupting in her turn, “I think less than sixteen is at least to be called young.”

“Yes, it is,” admitted the lover reluctantly, “and I will wait. As to the home, Ada and

I were well on the path, which I trust it is not profane to call the road to paradise, before I heard that she had property in her own right. I hope you will believe that no such motive as worldly gain actuated me. It would distress me if I thought you could attribute any other motive to me than the love of a creature so lovely that she has given me clearer ideas of heaven and the angelic beings than all my studies were able to evoke, and who is in herself such an infinite gain—if I may be allowed to use the word in connection with a finite thing—that all mere wealth is but dross beside her.”

Hedwig listened, wondering that butterfly Ada could be won by a person who expressed himself very much as the wall of a seminary might be expected to woo if it were moved to love and given speech; for a swift moment she trembled lest it was victory over her friends, and the love of conquest, which, without her own knowledge, might be influencing Ada, and not love. But ponderous as his

words were she recognized the young man's sincerity, and respected the feeling of true manhood he was expressing so laboriously. So her doubt was not audible in the cordial voice in which she said: "I should never have mistaken you, Mr.—Alonzo! I am certain Ada's poverty or wealth would be indifferent to you now."

"It might as well be," said Ada, nodding her pretty head with laughing determination. "My money will all be spent on myself, on dresses, and amusement very likely, or on whatever I want most; not on the house, nor on anything but just myself, no matter who I marry."

"No one could take seriously anything said by such a childish, pretty little creature as Ada," Hedwig only murmured fondly; "my selfish little Ada;" while Alonzo smiled back at her, and said: "That is precisely what I should desire, my love."

"But in the meantime, and to be practical?" hinted Hedwig.

"The large city churches pay excellent salaries, and I hope I may be called to one of them. In an age when doubt is assailing the strongholds of our faith, and even some of our most prominent divines and theological professors relegate the Scriptures to a place among the historical and semi-mythological records of past races, it seems to me not unlikely that my orthodoxy may win for me a position of distinction," said Alonzo.

"But you have no more solid basis to build a home upon yet than hope?" asked Hedwig gently, and not voicing her strong doubt of orthodoxy being an alluring quality in a candidate for a big prize city parish.

"N—no," admitted Alonzo. "I have thought of a mission on our frontier, but though the Board sees that a minister's family in those out-of-the-way spots is provided with clothing, Ada would not endure the hardships of such a surrounding."

"Well, I rather guess not!" cried Ada. "Go live among the Sioux, and such gentry?"

Nay, nay, my little Apostle! I told you I didn't intend to go in for seriousness; not yet."

"I would not ask you to go west, dear," said Alonzo; to Hedwig's surprise he was evidently too deeply in love to be shocked by Ada's flippancy. "I should myself prefer going to China; there one has always good society, because of the English and American residents. I should not be surprised if there were excellent posts in our new possessions, the Philippines, or Porto Rico; perhaps I could get hold of something in Cuba."

Hedwig listened in amusement to this simple ingenuous view of foreign missions, not altogether apostolic, yet quite natural in a youth who looked forward to marrying, and required the heathen as a pedestal, so to speak, for his household gods.

"China! No, thank you!" cried Ada with equal decision to that she had shown in the matter of western labors. "Do you think I want to go to the ends of the earth, right down under this floor, and stand on my head, and look

like this?" And with her little left thumb she flattened her slightly upward tending nose, and laying the middle finger and thumb of her right hand over her eyebrows she drew the outer corners of her lids upward. Both her hearers laughed indulgently, and Ada continued: "No, sir, Mr. Alonzo Read, you are not going to get this little lady to go with you anywhere that isn't very nice and attractive. You are to get a big city parish, where you will have a salary of not less than five thousand a year, with ten thousand possible when you're older, and you are to write tiresome old historical novels that are enough to send any one crazy just to think of, but which will sell, for all the ministers are taking to novels lately, and they make heaps of money—goodness knows why! And the best of it is that the sweller the church, and the bigger the salary, the more time you will have to go in for literature. And you are to have an assistant who will do the work, and talk to the old women, and bind up broken hearts, and all that kind

of thing, while you draw the money. Now, there's my program, and you go ahead, and carry it out, and come back to marry me, like Bobby Shafto—only you are dead certain not to have silver buckles on your knees. Come out under the trees; I'm tired of staying in, and Hedwig will talk seriously all night, if we let her. We're engaged, and it's fun to be engaged, and there's no kind of hurry to be married—we don't want to be married, in fact, so come on; what's the use of prosing here when there's such a moon outside? All lovers like moonlight; you'd know that if you'd only read novels instead of those stuffy old notes on Job, and things." And the aspirant to the honor of being a minister's wife stepped out through the long French window humming "Bobby Shafto's gone to sea" in a slight, but pleasing voice.

Alonzo lingered to take Hedwig's hand before following her. "You must not think she is trifling, nor unsuited to the high calling in which she will help me," he said. "When we

are alone she often talks quite beautifully of what we can accomplish together. She is excited by our conversation, and having me here with you as her betrothed husband, and she is full of spirits, and she is so very young!"

Hedwig liked him for that speech better than she would have believed possible an hour earlier, while it gave her a pang to find some one thinking himself nearer to Ada, possessing deeper knowledge of her than she had. "I fully understand, Alonzo," she said kindly. "You are a good man, and Ada is right to trust you. But I beg you not to hold your engagement so certain that it will harm you if disappointment ends it. You see yourself how unsettled and vague the future is."

Alonzo answered quite simply: "There is but one way to hold an engagement, Sister Hedwig, and that is as the most sacred of earthly things. If there is any way in which I can look forward to making Ada my wife, work for her, pray daily for our union, and yet not let failure in the end be bitter pain to

me, I do not know it. I will do my best, and I feel sure I can make a home for her. In the meantime we are sure of each other's love and constancy, and that is enough to be grateful for in one year." He followed Ada's little figure down the path, and Hedwig stood alone in the great room in which the heavy old-fashioned mahogany furniture cast curious shadows. A feeling of desolation and longing swept over her, pain that gripped her around the heart, and filled her temples with its agony. She felt solitary, with a solitude greater than the mere loss of Ada involved. Love was a beautiful thing; even this awkward, unattractive, ponderous boy who had stolen away her treasure was glorified by it into manhood and nobility that set him high above his daily self. She was missing something, something little Ada, not yet a woman, was tasting out there under the big elms. Faith, mutual trust, hope, tenderness, courage to endure, even joy in enduring for the sake of some one dearer than self—these were beautiful things, and Hed-

wig's big heart suddenly craved them, left to itself for the first time in all the twenty-five years it had been beating devotedly for others. "If only Ada is happy," she murmured, falling back on her old liturgy, as she wiped the tears from her dark lashes, and wondered why the magic words brought with them no comfort.

In less than a month Ada's lover went away from Fenford. It was not encouraging to the high aspirations for the future entertained by the youthful pair that Fenford did not ask him to linger beyond the specified summer months for which he came, but sought further for the minister who should succeed Mr. Bliss. But Alonzo went away undismayed, both he and Ada reminding each other how undesirable Fenford was, and how unable to appreciate the qualities necessary to a city call.

The number of letters passing each way daily between the separated lovers was so great as to change the dull monotony of the Fenford postmistress' life into one replete with inter-

est. Hedwig was surprised to find Ada's enthusiasm for writing holding out even through the nutting season, when the woods and hills around the village beckoned every one abroad with gestures of such color that Hedwig herself could not resist them. For once in her life Hedwig neglected household tasks, and went dreaming through the autumnal glory, restless, lonely, vaguely dissatisfied with her lot.

Mrs. Seaver, who lived on the southern boundary of Fenford, announced a Hallowe'en party, which she intended giving in honor of a distant relative, a cousin of her husband's, who was coming from New York to spend his late vacation of two weeks with them. Fenford was used to Hallowe'en parties, but not to new young men; the girls were agog with the news, which transformed the dulness of trying charms with no greater possibilities than seeing the face of a youth familiar from childhood in the glass over one's shoulder, or in the pond where the daring went to look at

midnight. Ada professed indifference, by virtue of her engagement, as to whom might follow Alonzo in stirring the hopes of Fenford maidens, but the girls, grown wary of her since they had seen how her indifference terminated in the first case, noted that she was having a new gown made for the occasion, and Hedwig noted, without dreaming of connecting the two circumstances, that just before the party Ada's ardor for letter-writing abated somewhat.

The two sisters drove soberly to the party, under the guardianship of Hiram, who had driven old "Dec"—short for Decoration Day, the horse's birthday—since they both had been decidedly younger. Hiram waited their return in the Seaver kitchen, and "Dec" in the Seaver stable, in the simple country fashion.

Ada was radiant that night in soft, pale green, turning her into a Lorelei with her golden hair; she had a talent for colors quite beyond the reach of any of her friends. Hedwig, always thinking only just enough of her

adornment to meet absolute requirements, was that night more than usually indifferent to her gowning; she wore brown, just touched with gold, harmonizing with her eyes, hair, and skin, and had massed her abundant dusky hair low at the back of her strong white throat; it chanced that she had never been so handsome, nor so well fulfilled Aunt Huldah's prophecy that she would "grow up to her features."

Mr. Seaver's cousin was easily distinguished; he had what was known as "the Seaver look," for they were a marked race. But with him there was another, slightly older man, wearing, like the new-come Seaver, metropolitan garments, with an easy, metropolitan air. He was not a handsome man, but he was distinguished, and brains as well as heart were easily seen to be his portion.

"Cousin Julius brought a friend with him, most unexpectedly," whispered Mrs. Seaver. "I really didn't know at first what I should do, but I guess we'll make out; I put the two boys in the east chamber, and Hettie went in

with Vesta, so that gave me an extra room. The other one's name is Guilford, Thomas Guilford. He's a painter by profession, but he's got an independent fortune, so he can do pretty much what he pleases. He may stay about here some time; he wants to make studies—that's what he says—of winter effects of the sky, and tree shapes when they're bare. I don't see just what he means, but he seems nice, and Jule says he's the finest fellow he ever came across. Maybe he'll want to paint portraits," she added with a significant glance at Ada in her naiad gown.

Ada tossed her head, but none the less wandered across the room toward the strangers. Standing unseen behind them she heard Julius Seaver say to his cousin and host: "Who is that wonderfully handsome girl that just came in?"

"The blonde in green? That's Ada Ainsborough; she's the prettiest little thing around," replied Mr. Seaver proudly.

"Who? That bit of a girl?" cried Julius.

"Oh, she's pretty enough, but she's just the usual type; nothing to her. No, I mean the other, the dark one; she's worth looking at. I call her something stunning. Introduce us. She's one to paint, eh, Tom?"

"One to paint, and one to love, if there's any truth in faces," replied the artist quietly. "I agree with you that the little blonde is pretty, but the other is a type to appeal to an artist, and incomparably more interesting, as well as attractive. I should like to meet her."

"Why, that's Hedwig Ainsborough, the other's half sister," said Mr. Seaver slowly, trying to readjust his ideas of beauty to this new dictum, unquestionably based on standards worth respecting. "She isn't considered near so good looking as the little one, but she's wonderfully good and devoted to her sister. I'd be pleased to introduce you."

Ada listened with incredulous rage to this brief conversation. They were speaking of Hedwig, brown, plain, and—comparatively—middle-aged Hedwig, Hedwig her sister, and,

as she suddenly realized, her inferior and slave! And they were men who had seen the world, the New York beauties, of whose style and splendor she had read in the correspondence column of the county paper! And one was an artist! And he ought to know; there was no escaping respecting his opinion more than that of Fenford. She felt that her world, her secure foundations, were crumbling beneath her feet; her scepter waving about in her tight grasp, with no more stability than a shaving, and a gust of angry jealousy against Hedwig swept over her, apparently wiping out all love and sense of obligation she felt for her elder.

And just then Mrs. Seaver came across the room followed by Hedwig, and Ada, forgotten and unnoted, heard her saying: "Miss Ainsborough, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Guilford, and my cousin Mr. Seaver."

And Julius Seaver replied: "Thank you, Cousin Mercy; you are fulfilling your name."

CHAPTER IV

THE atmosphere of the great world beyond the borders of her life which these strangers brought with them, and for which unconsciously she longed, aroused Hedwig to her best as she talked with them. She did not forget to beckon Ada to her to share her pleasure, and both men murmured some words of compliment as they were presented to her of whom Guilford afterward spoke as "Undine," not only because of her sea-green colors, but because his keen eyes noted her lack of soul. The bewildered girl found her small stock of what she had been accustomed to consider bewitching conversation entirely at a discount. Hedwig and their new acquaintances, the artist more especially, were talking of pictures and musty old painters in terms quite unintelli-

cloak and in silence, and leaning back in the furthest corner of the venerable family carriage sulked all through the drive under the autumn stars. The Holbein red chalk reproductions were faithfully brought the next day, and the portraits of Sir Thomas More's household served to introduce the young men who were visiting Fenford to the Ainsborough household.

Julius Seaver's stay was to be but two weeks long; it behooved him to make the most of his opportunities. Both young men apparently did not consider Ada worth much effort at first, but devoted themselves to Hedwig, to the boundless surprise and disgust of the younger sister. Nor was Hedwig's behavior less of a disagreeable shock to Ada. Forgetful of her proper place as the elder and plainer of the sisters she was behaving with a youthful levity most unpleasant—Ada confessed to her especial friend that she could not understand it. Hedwig did not understand herself. Always grave, from her childhood accustomed to hearing herself called "the little old woman," she

found herself ready to laughter, and full of spirits which bubbled over into fun at the slightest provocation. Still more incomprehensible to herself was the fact that she, who had not in all her life made an intimate friend, was treating two strangers—young men at that—with cordial frankness that bordered on intimacy, and found the relationship sunnily delightful. Julius Seaver and his friend shared her favor equally in the beginning, but when the first week of their visit had passed Hedwig had discovered an indefinable something in the manner of her neighbor's cousin which was not acceptable to her; the subtle something which is not quite good breeding, and at the same time she found that Tom Guilford, on the contrary, revealed finer qualities and greater charm the further she succeeded in penetrating through the reserve of manner in which nature had enveloped him.

Seaver was fond of talking finances; it was not long before Hedwig gathered that he had "taken sundry little flyers" in Wall Street, and

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come out with his wings well powdered with golden dust, or, to use another metaphor, had carried off considerable of the golden fleece, instead of getting his own sides shorn, as is too commonly the case of lambs who venture among the bulls and bears.

"I suppose your fortune reposes in the savings bank, according to time-honored country custom," he said to Hedwig one day when they had been discussing ways of making a fortune. "I suspect you are contentedly drawing three and a half, or, at the most, four per cent, and thus depriving yourself of not less than half of your possible income. Isn't that the case?"

"I can't say about possible losses, but our investments certainly yield about what you set them down for," replied Hedwig.

"And it never occurs to you to change that? Wouldn't you like to double your resources?" asked Julius compassionately.

"If I could safely," said Hedwig, "but I am not inclined to speculate. We have enough for our necessities, even little luxuries, and it

is not a slight thing to know that we are safe. Why should I assume anxiety, risking my little fortune merely to increase an income that is sufficient? Perhaps if I were a man, out in the world where I could watch my own interests, I should feel differently, but I value my peace of mind more than a possible and doubtful gain."

"Why should you take a better investment if one offers?" cried Seaver. "My gracious, Miss Ainsborough, what a question! Why shouldn't you? Why on earth should any one be satisfied with a pittance when all he has to do is stretch out his hand for abundance? I didn't say anything about risky investments, mind you; of course it would be worse than foolish for you to go in for doubtful things, but how you, a clever, sensible, wide-awake girl can settle down, contented to put your good dollars in the teapot, as your grandmothers did, beats me."

Hedwig laughed with her new light-heartedness, and lifted the lid of the teapot beside her.

letter. I shall then insist on knowing why Ada—apparently with your co-operation—is treating me not only with cruel unkindness and neglect, but with contempt; as she ignores my letters, and disdains replying to my agonized appeals for an explanation. Yours respectfully,
A. Alonzo Read.”

The letter fell from Hedwig’s hand to the floor. He had written her? She had not received his letters. Poor fellow! And he blamed her too! And poor little Ada! Well, he was coming, and whatever the trouble was which had fallen on her little sister she must help her through it, at the same time that she was trying to help poor Alonzo, who was doubtless wretchedly unhappy.

CHAPTER V

ADA came in, flushed and glowing from her walk. She brought with her in her garments the cool November air, and the sodden odor of fallen leaves. She walked toward the mirror in which she contemplated a happy face, in striking contrast to the anxious one of her sister, who had less personal reasons than she for being troubled.

"Ada, dear," Hedwig was beginning, but Ada interrupted her without hearing.

"Mr. Guilford really is very nice, Hedwig," she said. Hedwig flushed, and looked up surprised.

"Yes," she said, "he is indeed nice; I hardly remember meeting any one equal to him."

"I think I approve of him, Heddie," Ada continued, turning her head from side to side

with as much satisfaction, and no more self-consciousness than a robin.

Hedwig's blush deepened. "Approve him?" she echoed.

"Yes," nodded Ada emphatically, too busy with her own reflection to see that of her sister. "He is a gentleman, and all right; he's more of a gentleman than any man we know, and I don't think I could object to him on any ground."

"Ada!" gasped Hedwig protestingly, by this time almost suffering from the intensity of her embarrassment, and entirely misconstruing her sister's meaning. "You—we—shouldn't—it really is impertinent——" She broke off, and Ada turned to face her.

"Impertinent! What, to admire him? Well, I like that!" she cried. "Don't you suppose he'd like to be admired? And what are you blushing at so fiercely? I hope you're not going to be an old maid like that one in '*Sentimental Tommy*' who hardly dared speak of a man! By and by you'll want to say

'words with which we have no concern' like Miss Ailie whenever you come to love-making in reading. Isn't it funny Mr. Guilford doesn't ask to paint me?" she added, turning back to the glass. "He asked to paint you. He doesn't seem to like me—yet. Later—well, we'll see!"

"You found Mr. Seaver more to your liking," said Hedwig, partly to obtain information on the subject troubling her, partly to cover her renewed embarrassment at what she misunderstood for a prophecy of future relations to Mr. Guilford through herself.

"Well, even if I did, that doesn't prove I was right," retorted Ada. "I begin to think his friend is worth three of him."

"I am thankful to hear you say so, Ada," said Hedwig, drawing a long breath of relief. "I have learned that you have been corresponding with Mr. Seaver since he went away, and it has troubled me greatly. If you like Mr. Guilford better than he—and I know how little reason there is to worry over that liking—

then I need not fear for Alonzo because of Mr. Seaver."

"Oh, that moonstruck Alonzo!" cried Ada impatiently. "And you learned that I was corresponding with Jule, did you? I wish that postmistress would attend to her own affairs!"

"I suppose every one in town has wished that sooner or later," said Hedwig with a passing gleam of humor. "But you forget, Ada, how young you are, and that she had some reason to feel that your sister, who had stood in the place of your mother to you, should know what you were doing. I hope, my dear, that you will tell me now about these letters, and put my mind at rest by knowing that you are not doing anything injurious to yourself, or dishonorable toward Alonzo."

Ada flounced down on a chair with anger expressed in her very skirts. "I can not tell you, Hedwig, what Julius has written me, for it is something that he said was for me only to know. You will know later, and be surprised

to find I am not the baby you take me for. That's every word you'll get out of me, so you might as well trust me, since you can't help yourself anyway. I guess Julius does like me pretty well; he says he misses me so that he takes every girl he sees coming down Broadway for me, and sometimes they turn out to be the darkest kind of brunettes—though they're always the pretty ones, he says—but I'm so on his mind he simply sees me in everybody! That isn't bad, is it? It's great fun to get letters with that kind of thing in them. But it isn't because he's fallen in love with me he writes—or at least not to tell me so; maybe he wouldn't do the big thing he has done for me if he didn't hope to get me to like him better because of it. But I don't promise him one thing, and he couldn't ask a girl to marry him till he makes his pile, anyway; that's what he says."

Ada had talked herself into high good humor, but Hedwig's face grew more and more horrified as she listened. If it were any

one but Ada she would say that the girl had not a sense of honor, nor—— But it *was* Ada, and youth and heedlessness must explain her; she interrupted her own half-formed thought to fall back into her old loyalty to her darling.

“Ada, Ada, dear little sister, you have not the dimmest perception of what you are drifting into,” she cried, opening her arms, and making an imploring gesture as she spoke. “Come here, my pet, and let me hold you, and rock you, and talk to you as if you were still the tiny creature you used to be.”

Ada arose reluctantly to accept the invitation. She did not object to being cuddled, but this was not the effect she expected to produce by her revelations of her second admirer’s desperate state of mind. Hedwig drew the bright head down on her shoulder, and gathered the flowing skirts around the body grown too big for her lap. Then she rocked to and fro, rubbing her cheek softly against Ada’s as she had done when she told her Mother Goose rhymes.

“Now tell your big sister all about it,” she

cooed gently. "I am afraid you are troubled, darling, and you never come to me for help, as you used to when your dolls broke. You don't care for Julius Seaver, by your own acknowledgment when you were speaking of—of Mr. Guilford. Then how about Alonzo, dearie; what is wrong between you?"

"Bother Alonzo!" cried Ada with such emphasis as to leave no doubt in her hearer's mind of her sincerity.

"Do you mean that you have changed toward him?" asked Hedwig anxiously.

"I mean I never really cared about him at all," said Ada, sitting up very erect. "If it hadn't been that all the girls were simply crazy for him I'd never have thought of him. I suppose I made up my mind I'd just *make* him like me, because he wasn't thinking about me, and the girls considered him great. I didn't like to be passed over—that's all! And now he takes it all as seriously—as seriously as the old Westminster Catechism! And I'm dead sick of it; that's the whole of it! And you needn't

look so solemn, Hedwig, for lots of girls get engaged to men they don't marry. I wrote him and told him he needn't consider it lasting, because I was so sick of it that I had to drop it. And he wrote pages of tragedy to me—reams! And at first I answered, and tried to reason with him, but he only got worse, so I stopped writing, and let the reams pour out if they wanted to. Then he said he believed I'd seen some one I liked better, and I told him I had—three—two men and myself. And he never did have a sense of humor, so he couldn't see that was funny, but wailed ten full pages of how he had trusted me, and was working for a good call, and laboring to give me a nice home. And I replied that he ought to be ashamed of himself, to work for me, when he ought to try for his old call for the sake of the good he could do—and I'd like to know if that wasn't a proper, pious sentiment? But he couldn't see that a bit more than he could see the funny side, so I gave up writing, and settled down with my part of the engagement broken, though he

wouldn't admit his was. I had all I could do to keep up my end of the Julius correspondence anyhow, and I got tired of being told I had no heart. So I don't see that you're likely to get your brother Alonzo after all, Hedwig."

"Oh, Ada, Ada; I really feel dreadfully for that poor young man!" cried Hedwig.

"Well, there's no denying he was a *poor* young man, is there?" laughed Ada. "Don't look so shocked; he'll live through it. Doesn't your beloved Shakespeare say men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love? It isn't the only youthful engagement that has been broken! I thought you never liked it, Hedwig, and now you look as grieved as though he had been the one you had picked out for me from the cradle! You wouldn't have me keep on pretending to care for him when I didn't, would you?"

"No; the only thing to do is to be brave enough to acknowledge a serious mistake," said Hedwig. "And you know I never liked the engagement, but I am deeply sorry that you

have been so mistaken, not only for the sake of the poor fellow, who must feel himself cruelly used, but for your own. It is such a sad thing to be the one through whom suffering comes to another! I am a little shocked, dear Ada, at the flippant way in which you talk of the matter. I can not quite understand, even though you were mistaken in thinking you loved this boy well enough to spend your life with him, how you can jest upon a feeling that must at least have been strong enough to mislead you. You do not realize what you have done, and I think, little sister, you should realize it—partly, at least—for it is not right nor womanly to trifle with the sacred things of life. And what are we to tell Alonzo when he comes here?”

“Tell him to go back again, I suppose,” said Ada, utterly unabashed, and half-laughing, though she looked sulky. “But he won’t come.”

“Why, yes; he is coming to-morrow; he has written me to say so,” said Hedwig.

Ada sprang to her feet. "Not really?" she cried. "What a nuisance! And what impudence! Wouldn't you think he'd have a little pride, and not crawl back to be slapped on the same cheek? Though I really must confess he has considerable cheek to get slapped! What shall I say to him? You'll have to see him for me, Heddie."


"No, indeed, Ada," cried Hedwig. "He says that you have not written him, and he is evidently in the dark as to the cause of your change toward him. He has a right to an explanation from you personally; it is the very least you can do for a man whom you had promised to marry. I will try to help you, little sister, and I feel profoundly sorry and ashamed of my part in the matter—I should not have consented to such a childish engagement—but I can not assume the responsibility which is yours."

"Oh, well; very likely it won't be so bad to see him after all," said Ada. "He must be awfully in love with me—poor wretch! And

as to you blaming yourself for the engagement, you needn't worry about that, for I should have done exactly as I pleased about it. I'm older than you are in lots of things now, and your consent was only a form—to be perfectly truthful, if not polite.”

Hedwig looked up at the pretty creature standing before her, and acknowledged the absolute veracity of her statement. For a moment she saw Ada as she was, and her heart sank. Then the old love, admiration, devotion leaped eagerly to its feet, as if to hold its position in her heart and life. It was Ada, so young, so pretty, sweet, and loving; the child still, whose heart had not awakened; to whom love and marriage meant no more than dolls and playing at housekeeping had five years ago.

The Reverend A. Alonzo Read arrived by the four o'clock train on the following afternoon. As he walked up the long path from the front gate where the driver had deposited him it seemed to Hedwig that the very shin-



ing of his clerical black handbag—just big enough to hold the requisite collars, cuffs, and handkerchiefs for short journeys, but leaving one in doubt as to its ability to furnish forth larger garments—expressed the despondency of his mind; that its glitter was the brilliancy of tears.

Hedwig was so nervous that she could hardly hold out her cold hand steadily in greeting to her guest, whose own nerves were in a pitiable state of collapse as he received her tremulous welcome, confirming his worst fears. Only Ada—dressed in a becoming gown, which should not make her less desirable in the eyes of one who could not possess her—only Ada was perfectly at her ease, and her: “Hallo, Alonzo; what brought you down? Glad to see you,” was as light-heartedly pleasant as entire indifference could make it.

“Ada—my dear Miss Ainsborough,” Alonzo began at once, setting down his bag just inside the parlor door, and pulling nervously at his sober gray gloves. “I have come for an ex-

planation: I demand to know the exact meaning of Ada's recent behavior."

"Now that's all right, Alonzo," said Ada in the soothing tone one would use to a tired, but slightly wearisome child. "You see there isn't a thing to explain; I couldn't say much more than I have—one way or another, for actions speak louder than words, you know. But you don't want any explanations right pop off, like this; what you want is tea. It is chilly out, and you must be tired after that poky old train; what made you take the slowest one there is, anyway? Tea is better than explanations, especially when the tea is coffee, as I believe ours is, now I think of it. It will warm you up, and brace you. It is going to be a cold day—for you, particularly," she added under her breath.

Alonzo looked helplessly at Hedwig under this prosaic treatment of his woes, and she found herself unable to meet his eye, struggling between her desire to laugh and cry.

"You will take a cup of hot coffee, I hope,"

she said. "I have had it made for you, and it is cold, as Ada says. Then won't you stay the night here? It is too hard a journey to repeat within a few hours."

"Miss Ainsborough, I will accept the coffee, but you can not expect me to accept further hospitality unless there be a satisfactory explanation of what seems to me the most treacherous treatment received by me under this roof. I am under the impression that you were ignorant of Ada's fickleness—I thought—Oh, I thought she cared for me!"

The break in the monotonous voice was touching. Hedwig's own voice trembled slightly as she replied: "I had no idea that anything was wrong between you till your letter reached me yesterday. Believe me, I am most sorry for it. Here is the coffee; let me give you yours before we begin to talk."

Alonzo drank the hot coffee with a rapidity that indicated the supreme preoccupation of his mind, rendering him impervious to pain. Setting down his cup empty, he turned to Ada.

"Ada," he began, "there is a train returning at six twelve. If you dismiss me I must take it. Please tell me at once what I am to understand by your recent behavior?"

"Don't go, Hedwig; we need you," said Ada, putting a detaining hand on Hedwig's arm as she rose. "There isn't one thing to tell you; honest, Alonzo," she continued. "I have decided that I couldn't think of marrying you; that's all. I changed my mind. They say women always do, and I am sure a girl as young as I am may have that privilege."

"Then you don't love me?" said poor Alonzo huskily. "Can't you love me, Ada? And how about my work which you always said you would be so proud of sharing?"

"Another mistake; that's all," said Ada. "I just turned, and came down the pulpit steps—that's the truth, figuratively expressed. I have been hearing, and seeing something of a world that would suit me better, and I'm going to marry—I don't know who, but a man of the world. Now, let's talk of something nice, be-

cause that's all settled, and what's the use of being uncomfortable? I'll drive you to the station—it's nearly time to start, by the way. And of course you know I'll be a sister to you—that's understood, isn't it?"

Ada left the room with a sunny smile, and Alonzo turned to Hedwig in appealing silence. "I am dreadfully, heartily sorry, my dear Alonzo," she said, moved by the misery in his eyes. "But I can not help you. Ada is a child; she does not realize in the least what a serious matter this is, nor how it hurts you. At the same time she is old enough to be quite beyond my control—influence, I fear I might say, truly. I wish with all my heart I had tried to prevent your engagement, but, as she reminded me, it would have been useless. There is nothing for you but to be a man, and find comfort in your work for others."

"But I love her," said Alonzo simply. "You have no idea how I love her—she is so sweet, so beautiful—she has filled my life since I saw her."

"Poor Alonzo; I know," said Hedwig, and as she spoke her sympathy for the honest fellow widened to include herself; for was not her life filled by Ada, and did the child realize how dear to her she was, how much of Hedwig's happiness was bound up in her?

Ada led the way to the carriage, and Alonzo followed, carrying the little bag, too large, alas, for the necessities of his visit. He turned back to clasp Hedwig's hand at the door. "Good-by. Thank you," he said, and walked away.

Few words were spoken during the slow drive to the station. As old "Dec" turned the last corner Guilford passed them on foot, raising his hat with a bow and a smile, returned by Ada radiantly.

"Is that one of the two men you wrote me you had seen, and whom you preferred to me?" asked Alonzo with a not unnatural bitterness.

"Yes," said Ada, nodding cheerfully. "He is an artist, and he and his friend were both very nice—more interesting than you, you see,

Alonzo; though you can't help that. The friend has gone."

"And does he care for you? He couldn't love you more than I do, Ada," said Alonzo humbly.

"He thinks Hedwig is prettier than I am, and prefers her to me—so far," answered Ada, and Alonzo was comforted, missing the significance of her additional two words.

"Is it quite final? Isn't there the least chance for me, Ada?" whispered Alonzo as he turned back on the platform, and held fast the little hand held out to him in its heavy glove and covered the other, which held the reins, with his own left hand.

"Not the least tiny speck of a chance, Alonzo. I am sorry, but you know you wouldn't wish me to deceive you," said Ada. "You'll find some nice girl, serious-minded, and all that, and you will be glad I was fickle. It was nice of you to take the trouble to come down to make sure. Now put it all out of your mind, because it is settled, and there's no

use thinking about it, and that's better than uncertainty."

Nothing could have been more convincing than the girl's cheerful lightness of manner and reassuring tone of consolation. Alonzo groaned, and turned away without another word beyond his hoarse "Good-by."

The train drew up in the station, Ada waved her hand to her departing lover, and turned "Dec" around for the homeward drive. She watched the train slip down the track, and go out of sight around the curve. With it she knew went Alonzo Read—out of her life forever.

CHAPTER VI

HEDWIG went down the street to do her Thanksgiving marketing with a rapid step, keeping pace with her swift thoughts. Ada had seemed so preoccupied—almost grave—for the last few days that it filled her sister with anxiety. It was such an unknown state of things for Ada to be in less than the highest spirits that Hedwig worried over her, fearing in her sentimental soul that after all Ada regretted her first lover, and was secretly pining for Alonzo.

She laid aside her misgivings for a while to give her undivided attention to such prosaic matters as the selection of the best turkey, squash, fruits, and the usual accompaniments of the solemn feast, and as she gravely moved to and fro the end of a turkey's breastbone—which seemed flexible enough to insure tenderness in its possessor—Mr. Jenkins, the presi-

dent of Fenford's savings bank, came into the butcher's shop on a like errand to her own.

He had known the Ainsborough girls' grandfather, and loved their father, and Hedwig greeted him with the heartiness of an inherited, as well as personal affection.

"I am glad to meet you, Hedwig," said the old gentleman. "I have been intending to see you for three days, and to-day should have contrived to visit you. Can you come with me to the bank for an hour? I am returning there as soon as I have left my order."

Hedwig assented, wondering, and soon found herself following Mr. Jenkins into the slightly stuffy little parlor of the bank, which was not imposing in its externals, but which was safe with the solidity of long standing, and a board of wealthy old directors who never risked its funds in investments capable of being questioned. It was because of the Fenford bank's absolute security that Josiah Ainsborough had chosen to leave his daughters' fortunes in its hands, rather than place them

where greater interest would have included greater risk.

Mr. Jenkins removed his great-coat and hung it on the nail where his great-coats had hung for forty years. Then he turned to Hedwig, chafing his cold hands, and eyeing her keenly over, not through, his gold-rimmed glasses.

There was something about the little parlor, the old president, and the general atmosphere of the conservative little bank reminding Hedwig of *Cranford*, and she thought of Miss Matty, and how *her* trusted bank had failed, feeling remarkably inexperienced, and like Miss Matty herself. There was a hint of danger—or she fancied so—in Mr. Jenkins' manner. "I wanted to inquire, Hedwig, how it has come about that you have allowed Ada to withdraw her money from our hands?" Mr. Jenkins began. "It seems to me you should at least have seen me in the matter—I confess I have been displeased by the manner in which you have proceeded, no less than I have dis-

approved of your action. It has occurred to me that there might be something in the affair that you did not know, and I felt it my duty, as your grandfather's old friend, to talk with you."

Hedwig looked up at the old gentleman with widening eyes of surprise and bewilderment. "I am sure I have no idea what you mean, Mr. Jenkins," she said with an effort. "Ada withdrawing money? Why, Ada never has anything to do with money, more than to sign a check I draw up."

"Do you mean that you are entirely ignorant of what that child has done?" exclaimed Mr. Jenkins, his stern expression giving place to a look of alarm, as he drew his chair close to Hedwig, and was seated.

Hedwig nodded. "Please tell me," she whispered.

"Why, that's the worst of it—I can't tell you—very much," said Mr. Jenkins. "Has Ada any business dealings with Julius Seaver?"

"Good heavens! Not that I know of—and yet he once said——" And Hedwig broke off, frowning at the floor as the faint recollection of the day when Seaver had suggested better investments to her, and Ada's taking up the suggestion, returned to her.

"Said what?" demanded Mr. Jenkins.

"Said that he could put me in the way of making greater interest on my money, and when I told him that I was satisfied, and disapproved of unhealthy inflation, Ada suggested that he make the same offer to her. I never had thought of it again, until this moment."

"Yet that is probably the explanation!" cried Mr. Jenkins. "Well, my dear Hedwig, I am glad that you have had no hand in what may prove a bad business. Ada has been sending her check for considerable sums to Julius Seaver; they have returned to us within three days, and amount to not less than seven thousand dollars. I have no choice but to honor them, for they have been cashed, and passed through the New York clearing house. Un-

fortunately that will which your father drew up, leaving everything absolutely to Ada, and not in trust as he meant to do—for he intended making another will, as you know—holds good, because of his sudden death before the second will was made. It is absurd on the face of it that a girl of Ada's age should have control of her money, but since it is so, her check is as good as if she were forty—and there you are!"

"She did not tell me! She has not breathed a syllable of the matter," said Hedwig, her very lips white. She was more hurt and distressed by Ada's duplicity than by the loss of the money—if it was lost.

"Then you cannot give me any information," said the old gentleman rising, and pouring Hedwig a glass of his own special port wine. "Drink this; you look very shocked and ill. Don't worry about it; it may not be so serious as it seems. It is possible that the money has been safely invested by Seaver, but I confess I would not trust a fellow who would influence a

girl like Ada to act secretly. Go home, and make Ada tell you precisely what has happened, and come back to tell me. I will help you to the best of my ability; you know that without being told so."

"Thank you, Mr. Jenkins; yes, I know what a true friend to us all you have always been," said Hedwig rising, and busying herself with the clasp of her furs to hide the trembling of her lips. "It is not the money that I care most about—but Ada—acting secretly, being indirect—not frank—" She broke off, her eyes filling with tears.

"Oh, come now; don't take it that way!" cried Mr. Jenkins cheerily. "She is young, and it is likely thought she was being very grown up—bright, business-like, all that sort of thing, you know—in keeping her own counsel. She undoubtedly did not regard it as deception."

"Thank you, Mr. Jenkins," said poor Hedwig again, and went swiftly down the stairs.

It was not necessary for Hedwig to tell Ada

that she had heard of her recent financial independence; one glance at Hedwig's face showed Ada that she knew, and it was something like a relief to have met the shocked, pained, troubled look the young culprit had been dreading.

"Come with me, Ada," said Hedwig, leading the way into the library, and seating herself before the fire. "Now," she added, without removing her wraps, "please tell me the whole story of when and why you began furnishing Julius Seaver with money?"

Ada flushed painfully; she had never in her life felt so mean and guilty as she did now standing before Hedwig, as one arraigned before the bar, and evasively meeting the honest eyes which looked her through with very little of their customary softness.

"I am only too glad to tell you, Hedwig," she said, trying to assume an air of ease, if not of self-assertion. "I am nearly crazy over the whole miserable business."

"It is something that you speak of it in the

proper terms," said Hedwig. "First, tell me why you gave Seaver money? What was the purpose for which it was intended?"

"Julius is in love with me—you must understand that first of all," said Ada. Hedwig made a gesture of impatience, and Ada continued: "Now wait! He knows it is hopeless, but still he does love me. And he is in a Wall Street broker's office. I suppose you know that. Well, he wrote me that he often was in the way of hearing of splendid investments, and if I wanted to get rich he might be able to get something good for me. He was very delicate about it—didn't say all this right off, but felt his way——"

"Baited his hook rather, you silly child," groaned Hedwig.

"Nothing of the sort!" cried Ada with spirit. "You are so uncharitable, Hedwig, with all your supposed goodness! I simply jumped at the chance, and then he did what was still nicer—he told me if I didn't want my name to appear I could make checks payable to him,

he would buy in his own name, and turn over the money in the end."

"And you trusted him to that extent?" exclaimed Hedwig.

"Yes, and I was right to trust him," said Ada. "I sent him a check for a thousand dollars; that was ten days ago—more. It didn't get back here, for he deposited it with his firm as security. Well, I made three thousand dollars on that first turn—that's what they call it—what do you think of that?"

"I think it must be true, the saying that the devil takes care that beginners in gambling always win," said Hedwig.

"Julius kept that money, and invested it again, but this time I sent another thousand to add to it, so I had five thousand dollars to put in stocks. And he felt so sure they were going up! But they went down—do you know that there has been a week of panic in Wall Street?"

Hedwig nodded. "I vaguely remember some such heading in the paper; Heaven help

us! I did not dream there was any reason for watching such news!"

"Well, there has been, and my stocks went down as if they had been lead, instead of the metal they were!" said Ada. "Julius wrote me to send him five thousand, quick, to cover them, or I'd be wiped out. I did it, and still they fell, until the five thousand was not enough to hold them, and Julius sent for more money. They were very nice—his firm—and did not sell me out until I had time to answer—of course that was owing to Julius!—I hadn't any more money in the bank, you know, and I sent him my note. Then another, and another—till I had sent notes for fifteen thousand dollars—and now—now—the stocks had to be sold out in the end, in spite of all that—and——"

"And you have thrown away fifteen—how much money, Ada?" demanded Hedwig.

"Twenty-two thousand dollars," whispered Ada.

There was dead silence in the room for a few

moments, then Ada burst into loud wailing, and threw herself on her knees, burying her head in Hedwig's lap. For a brief time Hedwig let her cry, without attempting to comfort her. Not only had the loss—so much greater than she had expected—appalled her, but her moral nature was revolted by what seemed to her inconceivable duplicity. But soon the remembrance that it was Ada sobbing so cruelly aroused the tenderness never failing the sister she loved, and Hedwig laid her hands on the shining hair, and smoothed it softly. "There, there, dear; it was all very wrong and dreadful, but you must not cry like that! Perhaps it is not as bad as you think," she said.

"It's worse," moaned Ada. "The notes aren't due yet, but when they come I'll have to sell my share of the bonds to pay them, and then I won't have any money but the little, tiny bit Mama left—I'm beggared, beggared, and I do so want to be rich!"

Hedwig could hardly forbear smiling at the childishness of this lament, but she said:

"What is mine is thine, little girl; nothing you have done would make me divide our purses; we never have divided them. And with this house, and an income from the twenty thousand I have *not* put in stocks, we shall manage."

"Hedwig, you really are good to me," said Ada in an unusual burst of humility, and with a fleeting sense of the nobility of this devotion which allowed itself no word of blame.

"I only ask that you will believe, and never forget that I truly love you, Ada, beyond anything else in the world, and that you will always trust that love, and confide in me henceforth without reservation," said Hedwig, kissing her. "And now I am going to send for Mr. Guilford, and tell him this wretched story, and ask him what he knows of Seaver's honesty, and whether there is any chance of recovering something of what is gone."

"Oh, no, Hedwig; don't tell him! What will he think of me? How it looks, the whole affair, and me sending money without your

knowledge to a stranger—Oh, please don't tell, Hedwig," Ada implored passionately.

"I am glad that you see that side of it, dear, but Mr. Guilford will pardon you because of your youth and inexperience; little girls are silly creatures, you know," said Hedwig, with an indulgent smile. "I must consult him, for he is the only one who can help us, if there be any chance of help."

Hedwig's note brought Guilford to her that evening. Ada was not to be seen, and Hedwig told the melancholy story of the girl's wrongdoing to their new friend, lightening as far as possible her share in the matter, and laying most of the blame on Seaver—where, indeed, much of it justly belonged. Guilford listened, pacing up and down the room in a concentrated rage. "The dastard!" he growled when Hedwig had finished speaking; he had not interrupted her once during her recital. "I confess I never had the highest opinion of Seaver—he was not so much my friend as he seemed to be down here—but I would not have

believed him capable of such sneaking, dishonorable, treacherous behavior as this! To take advantage of a young girl's ignorant confidence and childish vanity! Miss Ada has not done right, Miss Ainsborough; she should not have acted without your knowledge."

"No one could be more conscious of that than I, yet, Mr. Guilford, she had no idea of failing and she wanted to surprise me by the great fortune she should win. She has been hinting to me lately that I should find her less a child than I thought, but I did not pay much attention to her prophecies," said Hedwig. "Bad as it is, Ada did not mean to deceive, and it did not look to her as it does to us—and to her, now she sees the truth."

"I am not inclined to be hard on the poor little soul," said Guilford, with a smile for the serious eyes raised to meet his. "I shall go to New York to-morrow, and I will see if there is any chance of compelling Seaver to make good."

"No, indeed, Mr. Guilford; I can't possibly

let you do so much for me—for us,” cried Hedwig.

“Nonsense! It will be but a pleasant trip, and there is no one but I who stands the least chance of succeeding. Besides, you know I would do much more than that for you, Hedwig.”

Hedwig flushed under his unconscious use of her name, and in the shy joy with which it filled her forgot the grave trouble that had befallen her.

Guilford went to New York, and returned at the end of a week. He had made the journey in vain. All Ada's little fortune had melted away in the smelting furnace that can consume more than it can be fed. Seaver had acted within the law; his object had not been to win out of Ada's losses, but by appearing as a capitalist, with money at command and to lose, to strengthen his position with his firm, and come forward “on the street” as an operator. Some slight gain to his pocketbook there had undoubtedly been also, in the com-

mission paid him on the business done through his employers' firm.

Guilford and he had had a stormy interview, with no result beyond the former's satisfaction in calling him by the titles he deserved, and then Guilford set out for Fenford once more, heavy hearted over the misfortune which had befallen the two girls, and especially the one who, he began to realize, had grown very dear to him.

Hedwig received him with such warmth of gratitude that he could not help hoping that it was not only gratitude which she felt. She learned of his bad tidings quietly; she had not expected better, and had laid her plans to meet them.

"Ada's notes come due on the first of the month," she said after she had heard all that Guilford had to tell her. "I shall meet them."

"Hedwig!" cried the young man in genuine horror. "You can't mean that you are going

to give up your little fortune to save Ada from the consequences of her folly? My dear, unselfish girl, that you must not, you shall not do!"

"Yes, I shall," said Hedwig, smiling at his vehemence, and finding it delightful to be called such pleasant names, and defended so warmly against herself. "What does it matter which has the money? We should always share with each other, and Ada seems to feel heartbroken at the thought that she will be without resources really her own. I have no such feeling, so I shall sell my bonds, meet her notes, and go on being as happy as before, as her pensioner."

"You are mad, wholly mad; you must not strip yourself for another!" cried Guilford. "It is true of you that is said of mothers: the child's future is safely intrusted to the mother, but the mother is less certain of the devotion of the child. You feel toward Ada almost like a mother, young as you are, and you would never let her want a share of what was yours;

but she is young and untried. Don't, I beg you don't, carry out your quixotic and unwise plan."

"You must not doubt Ada if we are to be friends," said Hedwig with a grave smile, half rebuke, half gratitude. "I am a very determined person, like all quiet people, Mr. Guilford. If any one is to lose, it must be I—lose more, I mean; for Ada has already lost a good deal, for her. I shall meet those notes, and though I thank you for your protection of me, I am quite, quite sure it is unnecessary: there never could be circumstances in which I could not count on my little sister's love."

Guilford groaned. "You are as bewitched in your way as Ada was in another," he said. "I am not imputing unworthiness to Ada, but human nature is a queer thing. Keep your money, and, if the day comes that it is necessary, share it with Ada, but do not give it to her now."

"I do not mind being poor, and she does; it is only a nominal difference, for what

can it matter who signs checks? I am afraid I must displease you, Mr. Guilford, for Ada is unhappy, and has been punished enough," said Hedwig with a quiet persistence that Guilford recognized as final. He left the house with a heavy heart, finding it hard to be patient with the sweet, unreasonable generosity of the woman he loved.

CHAPTER VII

HEDWIG was not to be dissuaded from her resolution to strip herself—or nearly to strip herself—in Ada's favor. In vain Mr. Jenkins, Guilford, and Aunt Huldah, whom they called to their aid, tried to persuade her into the ways of wisdom. When the notes fell due Hedwig's money went to pay them, and she had her reward in greater affection from Ada, and an apparent appreciation of her goodness—sincere, if only it proved lasting—on the part of her young sister. Hedwig herself was childishly indifferent in the matter; having always had what was, for the small place in which she lived, a considerable fortune, she did not know the worth of money, and if she had known it she could not have been made to see that it mattered in whose hands it lay;

since her interests and Ada's were as one as their mutual love made them.


Sublunary things were very inconsequent to Hedwig at this time. She was wrapped in a pervading joy which she had not stopped to analyze, dreading, perhaps, to lessen its delicate beauty if she called it—even in her thoughts—by its true name. Guilford still lingered in Fenford, though the New Year had come and gone and snow lay over the hills and ice bowed the trees. To be sure he had come to study winter effects, and one can not obtain these well except in winter, but Fenford smiled knowingly, feeling quite sure it was summer warmth that charmed him in their village, though uncertain which of the Ainsborough sisters' eyes furnished the sunshine in which he basked.

But Hedwig knew; in a thousand and one delicious, subtle ways she felt that she was beloved, and yielded herself up to the dawning joy which was to crown her with all the rapture of her strong and loyal nature.

In the meantime Guilford was not idle. He had secured a fine north light in renting a sacred, shut-up parlor in one of the village houses, and there he had set up his easel and each day painted industriously. The studies of winter scenery which he really had come to Fenford to make he progressed in steadily, and daily added notes and sketches for the work to which he hoped to treat himself after duty tasks were done. The "duty task" of that winter was an order for a large historical canvas, and on that he worked hard enough to warrant self-indulgence, not only in the studies for the pictures he intended to paint to please himself, but in other, still more alluring directions. The drawback to his labors would have been the impossibility of getting models suitable to the historical picture, had it not been that Hedwig and Ada volunteered to sit for him, and their contrasting beauty, added to the intelligence the professional model rarely possessed, made them ideal models for the crowded, splendid scene he had chosen.

The girls threw themselves into this new interest with the delight of "dressing up," play-acting, and love for art combined. It was wonderfully exciting to don the stiff brocades, and take the princess-pose which was Hedwig's. Not less so to slip into the diaphanous drapery, and band the hair with the pearls which reappeared in the long golden braid, and around the white throat in Ada's costume. There were long, intimate talks while the painting went on, and both sisters were required to pose together. At other times the one not posing read aloud, and Ada found there were joys in the "solid books," which she had always carefully avoided, quite unexpectedly absorbing.

It made a pretty picture, the dark haired girl with the strong, sweet face, in her stately brocades, and her queenly head bent over her page, or the fair young creature, in her clinging white robes and the pearls, with the light resting on her golden hair as she read. Ada had grown gentle and subdued; her recent ex-



perience had daunted her self-confidence, and the perpetual wonder as to what Guilford thought of her, with the desire to have him think well of her, made her behave with a sweetness that was new to her.

Julius Seaver was heard from no more, which seemed natural to all but Ada. She could not understand why, just because the investments he had made for her in good faith had turned out badly, he should suddenly cease writing to her, and why the love he had expressed so beautifully should suddenly cease to be expressed at all. But even Ada had her little share of self-respecting pride, so she buried these thoughts in her own heart, and being without an admirer made ready to welcome Alonzo and Julius' successor.

Perhaps if there had been present a less absorbed onlooker than Hedwig and the artist—if Aunt Huldah, for instance, had been there with her sharp eyes—she might have seen that Ada regarded Guilford as not undesirable to fill that vacant place, but both Guilford and

Hedwig were too absorbed, in addition to considering Ada a child, to see that her new graces had root in anything more complex than repentance and humility. And Ada's self-absorption prevented her, in turn, from reading the love story growing up beside her while she read from no more clearly printed pages. Helping her blindness was the conviction, born of long habit, that Hedwig must give way to her in all things, and that no one to whom she displayed her own graces could seriously prefer her sister. Matters drifted on thus pleasantly until February, and then, with the long springlike light, came revelation to all three actors in the little drama.

Guilford had erected in one corner of his studio an imposing throne of solid-appearing, if not actually solid structure. It was hung with tapestries which he had had sent down from the city, and the cross-beams of its canopy—which he had joined himself—were concealed by their soft folds.

One day while both sisters were resting

from their tiresome poses—it was a day on which the artist had been in strong working vein and had drawn heavily on their kindness—Hedwig had seated herself just in front of the throne with Ada but a little distance from her. Ada was studying an oft-conned portfolio of Guilford's sketches, while Hedwig sat with her hands idle in her lap, completely restful. She possessed in perfection the rare power of perfect repose—a quality Guilford found delightful.

Suddenly, without so much as a warning crack, the side cross-beam of the throne canopy gave way, and fell, crashing down between Hedwig and Ada, and forcing them both to the floor. Guilford dropped palette and brush, and sprang forward crying: "Hedwig, Hedwig!" There was no room in his first terror for a thought of Ada.

Hedwig arose at once; she was half stupefied by the shock, but not injured. She smiled reassuringly into Guilford's anguished eyes, and then remembered Ada with a pang of self-

reproach that was almost terror, that she could have forgotten her.

"I am not hurt," she said. "Is Ada?"

"Nothing—nobody else matters," murmured Guilford, and then turned to help Ada, with a fervent: "Thank God."

Ada had escaped with no more serious injury than flesh wounds, but had been struck more heavily than her sister—it was marvelous that only the ends of the beam had touched both; the full weight of the wood might easily have proved fatal.

Guilford raised the little golden-haired creature with tremulous tenderness; he too was shocked that even his love could have made him entirely forget her danger—she who was so dear to Hedwig.

"Are you hurt, dear little Ada?" he asked, for she drew away from him as if in pain.

"Yes, but not much; it doesn't matter," said Ada. "Can you take me home, Hedwig?"

"Not yet!" protested Guilford. "Let me arrange some sort of couch for you both, and

call Mrs. Benton. I have wine, you know, and she can fix you up something hot."

"I want to go home," moaned Ada, bursting into tears which the pain and shock amply explained to both her companions.

"I will go with her," said Hedwig. "I am quite able to go if she is. Ada, darling, are you sure you are not much hurt?"

"I don't know; won't you come home quickly, Hedwig?" cried Ada pettishly. And Hedwig got on her cloak, and wrapped Ada in hers without another word.

Guilford took the sisters to their own door, Hedwig leaning on the arm he offered her, but Ada walking stiffly alone, though every step wracked her. Guilford set her behavior down to ill-nature called forth by her pain; Hedwig, more charitably, thought her nervous and suffering. Both were too happy in the disclosure of the past hour to reckon present pain much moment, and Guilford was still quivering with the realization of his narrow escape from losing Hedwig, and what that

loss would have meant. He knew, too, that he had betrayed his feeling for her, and felt certain it was not unreturned.

Arrived at the Ainsborough door Ada broke from the other two, and ran into the house with scarcely a muttered "Good-night." Hedwig and Guilford lingered a moment, holding the hands which they both felt it would have been so hard to have clasped in an eternal farewell. Hedwig said no more than her faint "Thank you" and "Good-night." But Guilford added: "You are safe, Hedwig! All my life will be too short for my act of thanksgiving."

Hedwig went up stairs to Ada feeling bruised and weak physically, but with the hymn of praise in her heart rendering her deaf to the complaints of her body.

She found Ada lying face downward on the bed, her hat fallen on the floor, her heavy cape not removed, her whole slender body shaken with tempestuous sobs.

Hedwig stopped short for a moment,

shocked by Ada's abandonment of attitude and weeping, then she ran forward and dropped on her knees beside the bed.

"Ada! Why, dear little Ada, are you suffering so much as this?" she cried, trying to take the convulsed form in her arms. But Ada drew away from her, gasping as she did so: "Yes, I am suffering just as much as I can, but it doesn't matter to you as long as you are happy."

"Why, Ada! Even if you are in pain you should not be so unjust as to say that," cried Hedwig. "When was I ever indifferent to your least little childish ache? But never mind, dear; you did not mean that. Where is the pain? Your back isn't hurt, is it?"

"Back!" exclaimed Ada, turning a swollen and indignant face on her amazed sister. "You know perfectly well that I am not crying for anything of that sort!"

"What then? Has anything gone wrong with you, dear? Surely you are not unhappy?" said Hedwig, more and more puzzled.

"Mr. Guilford never once thought of me when that old thing fell! He didn't care whether I was dead or not, provided you weren't hurt," Ada said in an angry burst.

Hedwig colored. "Did that hurt you, dear? You must not think he didn't care; I am sure he cared, but, but——"

"He cares more for you!" sobbed Ada. "Oh, you needn't explain. I understand quite well; if I didn't understand my heart wouldn't be broken now."

Hedwig turned white to her lips. "What does that mean, Ada?" she whispered.

"It means that I love Tom Guilford and I don't care who knows it! It means that I have not once dreamed that he would not care for me—and he would love me, if it weren't for you—you, who pretend to want my happiness more than anything on earth! Go away; I don't want to see you!" And Ada threw herself back into her old position, moaning into her pillow.

Hedwig knelt upright, motionless for a mo-

ment beside the bed; her face was not only pale, but livid. Then she fell forward, hiding her face in the dainty silk coverlid her own hands had made for Ada. Ada abated her moans somewhat as she felt Hedwig's weight on her feet; she seemed to be listening.

"How can you love him, Ada?" Hedwig asked at last, her voice, muffled by the silk, sounding strained and hard. "He has never shown any particular affection for you, and last year you thought that you cared for Alonzo——"

"Alonzo!" interrupted Ada scornfully. "I was only fifteen last year, and I told you why I made that mistake; it was because he had not thought of me."

"And are you sure it is not wounded vanity that you are mistaking now for love?" asked Hedwig.

Ada felt the change that put her sister on the defensive with her, and unconsciously drew on her best histrionic talents to meet it. "Is it likely?" she said gently. "Is it the same

thing, a child's fancy for such a crude creature as Alonzo, and a later love for a man like this one? What was it that book we read yesterday said about the half-gods going when the gods come? Any one might love Guilford—I wonder you didn't, Hedwig." Hedwig made no answer. "You said that Mr. Guilford had not shown any special liking for me. He had not shown any for you until to-day. And now, just when I was so happy, when every day I have been hoping, and trying for his love, my own sister—you, ten years older than I—you, who always said you would do anything for me—step between me and all that I want on earth! Oh, I can't bear it, I can't bear it!" And Ada's sobs broke forth afresh.

"Perhaps you won't have to bear it, Ada," said Hedwig, rising; her own eyes were bright and dry, and her voice low and steady. "I could not make Mr. Guilford care for you, but I could—— I will go away now, dear, to help. This is all too sudden and dreadful. He can quite to understand. I will try to be

good to you, Ada—if I can. But don't—for the love of heaven, don't make another mistake! Be a woman, and this time be certain of your depth of feeling. It—it might be cruel to make a mistake—this time——”

She stopped suddenly, and Ada looked through her tears into her sister's glittering eyes. “I am quite, quite certain, Hedwig,” she said very softly. “My whole life is ruined; I love Mr. Guilford better than I would have believed I could love any one—but who could help loving him?”

Hedwig caught her breath as if something had stabbed her. She said no more; Ada's last words, so terribly convincing to her, who could conceive no way of not loving Thomas Guilford, silenced her. “Don't grieve, dear,” she said quietly. “Very likely it will all come right in the end.” And she went toward the door. There she paused, her hand on the knob, and turned back. Bending down she kissed Ada lightly on the brow, and swiftly left her. It was hard for her to believe that

they were her lips which could touch her darling little sister so reluctantly, nay even with a feeling of shrinking.

In her own room Hedwig did not sit down to weep. She placed herself rigidly in the old arm chair by the window, which had held so many dead and gone Ainsboroughs, and stared unseeing out upon the wintry landscape. How long she sat thus she did not know, but at last she sprang to her feet, and ran to the little shrine beside her bed, as if to escape from herself. There she threw herself on her knees, and clasped the edges of the small table with convulsive fingers. She could not pray in any form of words, but over and over again she hoarsely whispered: "Help me! help me!" Worn out at last she arose; the answer had come, or nature had won the battle for her. She could not resist, she was utterly beaten. With only enough strength and consciousness left to know that her course was determined upon, and that, cost what it might, she would not torture Ada, she threw herself

across her bed, and fell into the profound slumber of exhaustion.

Hedwig began the following day her difficult task of driving happiness from her. Guilford came as early as was possible to inquire after the victims of the fall of his throne, and, quite as much, to assure himself of the joy he had tasted after it, which he was impatient to drink of more freely. Ada, looking uncommonly pretty, with the delicate pallor left by her tears and physical pain, met him sweetly. "Hedwig is not at all hurt, thank you," she replied to his inquiry. "But she asks to be excused. She can not sit for you to-day, but I will—if you will have me! She said that if you needed some one for her costume to-day perhaps Nellie Burney would sit—she is about Hedwig's height and form."

Guilford could not disguise his dismay and amazement. Hedwig was not ill! But Hedwig would not sit for him! And to-day when the unspoken but acknowledged love he bore her claimed from an honorable woman its an-

swer? It could mean but one thing: he had been mistaken in thinking the love welcome to her. She meant him to understand that she had seen, and would have none of it.

"No, thank you; I won't paint to-day. Please tell your sister I am glad to hear she is not suffering," Guilford said shortly, almost rudely, as he raised his hat to Ada and turned away. Ada was not displeased; she understood that this stage must be passed through, and she felt certain that Guilford was not a man to bear many rebuffs, nor to need many hints of being unwelcome.

She repeated his message to Hedwig, who received it without a word, only a slight increase of the deadly pallor her face wore that morning. No one could gage what it had cost her to remain passive upstairs while Ada wounded her lover. "Not suffering!" Alas, poor Hedwig!

CHAPTER VIII

ADA was not wrong in her estimate of Guilford's character. Angry and hurt, dismayed and disappointed, bitterly pained as he was at first by Hedwig's sudden change toward him, a little reflection showed him that he had no right to resent the rarely honorable treatment which he was receiving. He could not claim Hedwig's love. If, when she perceived it, she withdrew from him she was but proving herself the woman he thought her who was above the feline desire to play with her prey. And if, in the excitement following the accident, she had seemed to him to recognize and welcome his feeling for her, the speedy change of attitude on the next morning proved him mistaken; he had no right to complain because she withdrew herself, and spared him.

He would not force himself upon her; he would—because he must—accept her verdict, and leave her in peace. Yet this was not easy. As days went by, and Ada alone of the two sisters came to pose for him when he was able to paint, the loneliness of the studio which was filled with reminders of Hedwig, made more poignant by Ada's presence, became unendurable, and he resolved to defeat Hedwig's merciful intentions in his regard by demanding to know his fate definitely from her lips. Ada was so sweet, considerate, gentle toward him during these hard days that he was forced to confess that if any one could have helped him through the loss of Hedwig it was her young sister, to whom, he felt, he had hitherto done scant justice.

In the meantime Hedwig was dragging through the interminable days; she could not have told how. At times she felt that the task she had set herself was not difficult, but impossible; still she continued to fulfil it by a dumb endurance of each hour's pain, not

unlike a dog's. Her one fear was that she should encounter Guilford, for she felt certain that she could not trust herself to meet the reproachful questioning of his eyes. She shut herself up in the old house, and grew so thin and ill that it was not long before Ada could reply quite truthfully to the inquiries she received for Hedwig, that her sister was not well.

How Aunt Huldah got wind of the trouble befallen her favorite niece it would be hard to say, but she announced to Hedwig that she was going to close her house, and come to stay with her. Hedwig's heart sank at the tidings; she realized that her secret would not be hers one day when her great-aunt's spectacles were brought to bear upon it. But her first dread gave way to a sense of relief; even if Aunt Huldah knew, what did it matter? Hedwig began to feel the necessity of some one's love and strength to lean upon.

Aunt Huldah closed her house, and arrived at the Ainsborough homestead, carrying a va-

happy in loving Ada, Aunt," said Hedwig, half smiling. "There never is any use in trying to deceive you, and I am glad to have you understand. I might have drifted into letting Mr. Guilford care for me without a suspicion of any reason for not doing so, but that I discovered that Ada had already learned to care for him, and was wretched. Then—well, what could I do? I never should have had one happy moment, knowing how Ada felt, so I have dropped out of sight, and I hope he will be wise enough to replace a dawning fancy for the older, ugly sister, with a real, lasting love for the lovely younger one. Then he will be happy, Ada will be blissful, and—and it will all end like the dear old fairy tales with all the trouble—if there be trouble—fallen on the step-sister. But of course I'm jesting; I shall be as happy as the day is long if my schemes turn out well, and Ada and he are content." And Hedwig ended with a sorry attempt at lightness.

Aunt Huldah was silenced for a moment.

Then she said: "Well, of all the consistently unreasonable obsessions yours has been the worst I have ever seen, Hedwig! And what if your sacrifice is all for nothing, Miss, and failing to get the girl he loves Guilford refuses to be comforted by the one whom he, or any sensible man, would think a pretty poor substitute for her?"

Hedwig flinched. "Don't, Aunt Huldah; I have tried so hard to keep that possibility out of sight," she said. "Even then, however, I should have to do my part; I couldn't take the place that Ada longed for. And don't you think it must come right—when it is so hard——"

She broke off suddenly, and Aunt Huldah answered with a gentleness that was rarely hers: "I think if there is any justice anywhere, you at least must one day, come right, as you call it, Hedwig."

That same hour in the studio was spent in discussing the same theme—with variations. Guilford had found patience and resignation

under affliction growing daily more difficult, and he was determined to learn definitely from Hedwig whether there was no chance for him with her. As a preliminary to this step he was trying to discover from Ada if there were any reason for her sister's altered treatment of him.

"I don't feel that I have any right to speak of Hedwig, Mr. Guilford," Ada was saying gently in reply to an interrogative hint of this nature. "You know already—so this at least there can be no harm in saying—that dear Hedwig is painfully conscientious and I think, inclined to imagine duties."

"And it may seem to her that it is her present duty to avoid me?" asked Guilford. "Now that is precisely the point I wish to be set right on; if that is it—and I believe it is—then there is nothing more to be said. But I have been wondering if there could be anything I did not know—any way in which she were offended, or hurt, for instance?"

"I think there can not be the slightest harm

in saying that I know positively that there is not. I am sure that Hedwig would be glad to have me tell you that she is just as much your friend as ever, and that whatever her reason for changing her course may be, it has nothing to do with anything like that; nothing that you could help," said Ada.

"I will write her," said Guilford slowly. "I shall never be satisfied unless I have done all I can; I ought not to take even your word for it, you know."

Ada laughed with a show of annoyance. "That is just like everybody—ask an opinion, and then not dare trust it!" she said. "If I were you I wouldn't bother Hedwig with a note. She would rather you would let it all go, I am certain of that."

"Very likely," said Guilford bitterly. "But I think I have some rights, and though I am sorry to annoy your sister, this once more I fear I shall be obliged to try her patience."

"Write your note then; I'll take it to her when I go home," said Ada impatiently.

Ada tossed her hat on the table with one hand, and the note into Hedwig's lap with the other simultaneously. Hedwig turned pale under the sharp eyes of Aunt Huldah and Ada's no less keen scrutiny. She did not speak, but tucked the note into her belt, and deferred reading it for the solitude of her own room.

She did not give her answer to Ada, though the girl asked for it, announcing that she was going past the studio that morning.

"I have posted it," said Hedwig briefly, and Ada dared ask no further questions.

For a few days Guilford did no painting, and Ada scarcely saw him. But her anxiety as to the result of the exchange of letters between him and Hedwig was set at rest by the grimness of his expression when she did see him, and Hedwig's increased melancholy.

At last Ada received a request from Guilford to sit for him, and gladly hastened to comply. He got out his brushes with alacrity, and had altogether such a new air of determination

about him that Ada pondered its significance as she sat watching him in her pretty pose.

The explanation did not come until the sitting was nearly finished. Guilford squeezed a little more vermilion on his palette, and suddenly looked up at Ada. "I am going away," he said.

"Away?" echoed Ada. "Soon? Not to stay?"

Guilford nodded. "Very soon, and forever," he said with a sober smile. "Haven't I lingered long enough in pretty Fenford?"

"Too long, too long," cried Ada, with a touch of real tragedy in her voice. "Oh, don't go! I can't bear it," and she burst into violent weeping.

"Why, Ada, why you dear little soul, do you really care so much about what I do?" said Guilford, touched by her grief, and sincerely grateful for the unexpected affection, so welcome to a man who felt cast down and cast out.

"Care what you do!" sobbed Ada. "You

are the one who doesn't care! You are the one who never thinks that I have one bit of feeling, or stops to realize that I shall die of loneliness without you."

"Not quite so bad as that, little girl," said Guilford, coming around to where she sat, and patting her head. "People don't die when friends go off, though it is nice to know you will miss me. Of course I don't think you destitute of feeling; I am sure you have plenty affection for those to whom you care to give it. And you are entirely wrong to say that I don't care; I do care, very much, too! I shall miss my little friend dreadfully."

"Don't! I'm not a child to be patted and poked into quiet," cried Ada, jerking her head away from the kind touch laid upon it. "You tell me you are going away as if it weren't anything, and I—I—I can't bear it, I tell you! There aren't many people to care for in Fenford; do you suppose— Oh, what is the use of talking to you? You pretend to be fond of me, but you are no more fond of me

than that lay figure is! I should think you might feel a little love for one who has been with you, served you——” Ada’s voice was lost in a passion of sobs.

“Ada, Ada!” cried Guilford, completely upset by this overwhelming grief, and as unable to think clearly in the presence of a woman’s tears as most good men are: “Ada, Ada, why do you talk so wildly? You ought to know that I do love you——”

He got no further. With a wild cry of delight Ada sprang to her feet, dashed the tears from her eyes, and threw herself on Guilford’s shoulder, where he held her, thinking she was hysterical. But her first words undeceived him. “Oh, Tom, dear darling Tom!” she cried. “Then you do love me! Me, and not Hedwig? And we both thought it was Hedwig! Or at least Hedwig thought so. Oh, I am so happy! You don’t know how I love you! And I should have died if you hadn’t cared for me, because you have grown into my life so, and it would have been cruel if you had left it

ruined! I might have known you could not have done that! I'll be the best little wife ever an artist had, and I'll serve you, and sit for you, and take care no bother comes near you, and help you be the greatest painter of your day. Oh, my dear, my dearest! I never would have dreamed I could be so happy! Now I shall not mind if you go away—or not mind much—because I shall know you are thinking of me, and are coming back to me. And now I shall get letters again—I shall have your letters, I mean—and they will be even nicer than having you—for a little while—because I shall know you in another way. Oh, come, let's hurry home to Hedwig! She will be so glad; she hoped so much for this!"

Guilford stood absolutely still under this burst of joy, except for the hands that were unconsciously clasping Ada closer as his nerves tightened up under the strain of trying to realize what had happened to him. He was engaged—and to Ada! She had taken his words to mean that he loved her—why, that

was what he had said, but in reply— Oh, well; it did not matter. He could not tell the girl rudely that she had mistaken him, dash the joy she felt—she, Hedwig's beloved Ada! And Hedwig "wanted this!"

As Ada paused for breath, looking up into his eyes she saw the blank amazement in them, and terror crossed her own. "Why don't you speak?" she demanded sharply.

Guilford pulled himself together by an effort. "How can I when you won't give me a chance," he said, realizing how little his manner suited the rôle of newly betrothed lover. "I had no idea, Ada, that you cared for me like this; not the least idea that you would ever marry me. You must not wonder if I am stunned."

"But you are happy?" coaxed Ada.

"Of course, dear," said Guilford, kissing the golden hair below his lips, and Ada was wise enough not to betray her consciousness that lovers often prefer something more responsive than hair for a first caress.

Guilford walked with Ada to her own gate,

but declined seeing Hedwig and her aunt until later.

"Congratulate me, Auntie and Hedwig—I am engaged," said Ada, walking into the dusky library out of the glow of her triumph.

"H'm," Aunt Huldah muttered. "How did you manage it?" And she glanced anxiously at Hedwig. Hedwig's face was in shadow; she sat very still for a moment after Ada had spoken, but Aunt Huldah's words aroused her. She arose, took Ada tenderly in her arms, held her close for a little while without speaking, then kissed her solemnly and long. "God bless you, Ada; I knew it must come right," she whispered, and left the room.

Guilford did not come to see his new family until the following evening. He and Ada had taken a long walk that afternoon, in which he tried to set matters before the girl as honestly as he could without wounding her. He marveled that when he had finished speaking he and Ada were engaged still; she had not

seemed to take in the significance of his delicately worded phrases, and was satisfied to be his wife. This being so, there was nothing for him but to accept the singularly unforeseen situation, and resolve to do his duty in that state of life to which he could not feel quite certain who it was had called him.

Hedwig received Guilford with perfect calmness. The hand she gave him was cold, but the words accompanying it were as warm as the most exacting lover could have demanded. He was shocked by the change in her appearance, and as he gazed into the faithful brown eyes which met his with a steadiness and patience that was full of unconscious pathos, an idea flashed across his mind that made him catch his breath, and which he dared not examine into then.

Hedwig did not linger long; after she had drunk the toast to the newly betrothed in the old Ainsborough sherry, she made some excuse, and bade her future brother a kind good night. This left the field to Aunt Huldah,

who had longed for a chance to say one word to her nephew-elect in private.

"Ada, go get me my knit shawl; I left it either in one of my bureau drawers, or in the closet," she said. And after Ada, who did not quite trust her, had reluctantly obeyed, she turned to Guilford. "You're a fool, Thomas Guilford, but you're a good fool, and a man I'd be willing to trust anything I love to. It's a queer engagement, but you know how it came about—we don't! Now I want you should make me one solemn promise. I don't want to insinuate anything undignified about my niece, especially since you're engaged to her, but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Ada was eager for an early marriage. I want you to give me your solemn promise that no matter what happens—unless Hedwig dies, and you feel you have to look after Ada—you won't marry her under two years. Will you make that promise?"

"Why, yes; I think I will," said Guilford, and the relief in his face did not escape the

keen eyes scrutinizing him. "Ada is really too young to think of marriage before then."

"Ada's a mere child," said Aunt Huldah with an inscrutable look. "Just an unsophisticated little girl! I shall feel better for having had that promise. And another thing. Don't keep running down to Fenford; stick to your work, and let Hedwig train Ada into the kind of wife she'd have made—if she can! At any rate, I think you ought to let a girl as young as Ada is have a loose rein, and not visit her too much. And you've got a friend in your great-aunt-in-law Huldah, and I'm sure I hope and pray I shall stand in that relation to you. I think you're a good man, Thomas Guilford."

Ada returned in time to catch these words. "Indeed he is, Aunty," she cried. "But did you send me away in order to flatter him with no one to check you? Here is your shawl."

Guilford left Fenford in a few days. It was a relief to every one but Ada when he had gone. Hedwig recovered a little when the danger of meeting him and the strain of knowing that

Ada was coming and going between them was over. Aunt Huldah welcomed his departure as the first step toward that rectifying of the recent errors to which she confidently looked forward. And Guilford himself was frightened to feel the relief he experienced in escaping from the necessity of keeping up his hard rôle of happy lover. Later, he told himself, he should play it better when time and absence had taught him the part, and modified the sting of recent disappointment. The thought that had come to him as he looked into Hedwig's true eyes haunted him, and grew more probable the more he dwelt on it. She must have known that Ada cared for him before he had known it, and had stripped herself of the wealth of her love, as she had stripped herself of material wealth, for Ada's sake. That would explain her change toward him, that only reconcile it with the love for him which he felt sure that he had seen in her eyes. But if this were true, what a tragedy of errors they were all playing, and how cruelly unjust that two should be sacrificed to the good of one!

CHAPTER IX

LIFE in the Ainsborough household settled down into its customary peaceful monotony after Guilford had gone away. He wrote regularly to Ada, long, interesting, but unsatisfactorily impersonal letters. Ada had a way of leaving them about which Hedwig found trying, but when she expostulated with Ada that young person replied that there was no more reason why one of her lover's letters should not be left on the library table than there was for secreting a guide-book—they were “nothing more than a most improving contemporaneous history of New York, any way.” Aunt Huldah raised her strongly marked eyebrows as high as they would go on hearing this remark from Ada.

“Not finding your latest engagement unsatisfactory so soon?” she asked.

"One might think I had been engaged no end of times, Aunt," said Ada pettishly. "I don't think that first engagement to Alonzo, when I was just a little goose, ought to count. As to this one being satisfactory, if Tom thinks he's going to improve my mind, he's much mistaken—and his letters are getting to be regularly stupid."

"Which proves that this engagement is bound to count, since you are no longer a little goose," remarked Aunt Huldah dryly.

Hedwig was not well. Although the spring had come, and Aunt Huldah was required at her own place to superintend the laying out of the garden, and had returned there with Miss Giddy, she was so uneasy about Hedwig that few days passed without her making time to drive down and see that all went well at the old house.

There was nothing really wrong with Hedwig, but her color had vanished, her step was languid, and the heavy shadows under her eyes suggested sleepless nights. Hints of "a de-

cline" began to circulate through the village, and older people recalled a sister of Josiah Ainsborough's mother who "had gone just that way."

Aunt Huldah was wiser, holding the clue to Hedwig's alteration, and hoped that fate would interpose in Hedwig's behalf before too long.

"We'll have to get off to the seashore this summer, you and I, Hedwig, if you keep on pindling down so," she said. "I guess you need change of scene, and seeing new faces."

"You won't have to go away for that," cried Ada, coming into the room with her face beaming. "Guess what has happened? The old Belmont house has been taken for the summer by city people who have discovered Fenford!" she added without giving them time to guess. "They are coming down with horses and no end of splendor; the house is going to be set in order, and they'll wake us all up. They heard of the place through Julius Seaver."

"Julius Seaver!" echoed Hedwig. "Are they his sort of people?"

"Is he coming too?" asked Aunt Huldah, with a gleam of hope.

"No, he isn't," said Ada shortly. "You are so prejudiced, Hedwig! Julius' friends were swell people; he always said so." And she walked off in high dudgeon.

Fenford was much stirred by the prospect of having the great world turn aside from its customary orbit to include the sleepy town. The preparations going on at the Belmont house warranted the belief that Fenford was to be shown the very finest example of the least disreputable of the trio which all Christians renounce in baptism, and most Christians serve more or less in adult years.

And when these preparations were complete, and the newcomers drove down to take possession, glittering with chain harness, a curly black *caniche* sitting beside the footman, and a Japanese spaniel, whose nose was a mere fiction, curled beside the highly decorative mis-

tress of the equipage, Fenford drew a long breath, feeling it had not been deluded. The first day after their arrival Mrs. Gay-Leavens drove over to call on the Ainsboroughs. She came in her dog cart, looking very smart in her appropriately fine gown, and brilliantly competent manner of driving. She was young, and pretty, and Ada had a flutter of admiration surveying her from behind the blinds, before she met her to succumb completely to her charms.

They found her examining the dark library through her lorgnette when Hedwig and Ada entered. "My dear girls, I am simply enchanted to meet you," she cried, coming forward. "I couldn't wait to let you call on me for fear you would not be quick enough about it. Mr. Seaver told me what loveliness was hidden away here—I mean the Fenford landscape, of course." And she laughed archly.

"What a queer, dear old place you have here!" Mrs. Gay-Leavens continued after the Ainsboroughs had murmured something in-

articulate in response to her rapturous greeting. "If it were mine I'd have it all done over—there are such lovely things now for libraries! Perhaps you can have it done while I am here to suggest out of my wider experience. Don't you think all these old houses have a queer, musty smell? Smells like Shintoism—ancestor worship, you know."

"You must respect other people's worship—and ancestors, remember, Mrs. Gay-Leavens," said Hedwig, smiling.

"I? Oh, I adore them—my own too, if only they are far enough back. Relations are a nuisance usually, aren't they? I'm having some of my own back numbers rebound, so to speak. I'm getting a coat of arms done. Mr. Gay-Leavens doesn't care for these things—doesn't care for anything but making money—and me! And that's a fine combination, for the 'me' can use all he gets of his other passion. Mercy, what a lovely cat! I simply adore cats." And Mrs. Gay-Leavens swooped down on the apprehensive Midas,


whose nerves, already tried by her strident voice, gave way utterly under the onslaught, and he defended himself with his claws on her long driving glove.

"Oh, what a horrid beast! Do you pet him when he behaves like that?" demanded Mrs. Gay-Leavens as Hedwig gathered Midas into her lap, and softly rubbed him between his eyes. "I believe I don't really like cats after all! My angel Mitsu would never be so treacherous!"

"It is hardly treacherous in poor Midas, for he had not professed friendship, you know, Mrs. Gay-Leavens," said Hedwig, inwardly wishing she were an irresponsible creature for a moment, long enough to express herself frankly as Midas had done. "Not being a real cat-lover, you forgot that they are the most nervous of animals, and startled him. I am very sorry; did he hurt you?"

"Oh, no; it doesn't matter. Just a light scratch, but my glove is torn. However, I get my gloves by the dozen, so that doesn't mat-

ter either," said Mrs. Gay-Leavens, recovering herself. "I hope you'll come to see me soon! We're going to have the loveliest time! House parties, and picnics, dances, theatricals—goodness knows what! Mr. Seaver said Miss Ainsborough did not care much for gaiety, but he told me I should find Miss Ada 'a peach'—and I see he's right! I really didn't expect to find you so pretty—young men do exaggerate, especially under some circumstances, you know! My brother will be down Friday; I hardly dare let him see you, because we always intended him to fall in love with a very rich girl we know in Chicago. But I wouldn't dare *not* introduce him, and I know if I do I can get him to do anything I want him to for at least a week!" And Mrs. Gay-Leavens laughed, and winked a tiny wink with what Ada thought a perfectly irresistibly charming mischievousness, but which made Hedwig's fingers tingle to box her ears for her impertinence, and led her to give Midas an additional touch of affection.



Hedwig remained obdurate to Ada's pleading to return Mrs. Gay-Leavens' call without delay. "We will be polite, but not expansive," Hedwig said firmly. "I will go with you before the canonical time for returning a first call is past. I am sorry that you do not see how ill-bred that little creature is."

"You are such an old fogy!" pouted Ada. "You can't like any one whose manners are formed on a model of later date than 1850! I think Mrs. Gay-Leavens is just charming."

Ada did not have to eat out her heart in waiting for the dawn of the prescribed tenth day. On the Saturday following her first call Mrs. Gay-Leavens' dog-cart turned into the Ainsborough's driveway, and at its side galloped a cavalier who sent Ada's blood quickly into her cheeks. He was young, not very handsome, nor even manly looking, but his riding outfit, from the horse to the heavy gold-handled riding-stock, was irreproachable, and Ada realized at once that, taken all in all, Fenford had never looked upon his like before.

"I simply couldn't wait to have my brother see you—and you see him—and both see each other," laughed Mrs. Gay-Leavens, addressing Ada; this time she made no pretense of considering Hedwig worth more than conventional attention. "I can't bear ceremony where I've taken a fancy, and if we are to be real friends—down here in the country too—we shall have to disregard keeping strict tally of calls. I mean to carry you off bodily this very afternoon; come and drive with me, and let Bertie talk to you while I put Beau through his best paces."

Ada flushed with pleasure at the prospect, and Hedwig said: "Bertie being your brother, and Beau your horse? You know we haven't yet learned one another's Christian names, Mrs. Gay-Leavens."

"Bertie" burst into a rapturous laugh; he had never once taken his eyes off Ada since he arrived, but had stared at her over the head of his riding-stock, thrust temporarily into his mouth, with a fixity of admiration that Ada

found as delightful as it was embarrassing. "Say, that's a good one!" he cried. "Like May Irwin in 'The Widow Jones,' don't you know! She says 'which is you and which your dog' when the fellow shows her a photograph of himself and his dog, don't you know! Miss Ainsborough is a wit; I see that. It's often that way in a family, one sister is the clever one, and one the pret——"

"Gracious, Bert! I beg your pardon! Are you all right?" cried his sister, as, by an awkward fillip of her whip she caused his horse to jump with a suddenness that drove the riding-stock against his wisdom-teeth, and made the tears start in his surprised blue eyes. "Bertie knows what it is to be overshadowed by a clever sister, Miss Ada. How long will it take you to get your hat? Don't change your gown; I protest against so much as a ribbon being altered—you can't have anything else so pretty and becoming."

Hedwig had to watch her sister disappear down the driveway, sitting up erect and gay in

the tilting cart, with the malapropos Bertie careering close behind her, and receive her triumphant wave of farewell with what grace she could summon.

"That's the first time in her life Ada has been properly environed," said Aunt Huldah, coming down from the upper hall where she had viewed the departure, from behind the closed blinds of the window above the front door, with very different emotions from Hedwig's.

"How can you say so, Aunt Huldah?" cried Hedwig indignantly. "I don't think any one of our family could deserve to be classed with such a parvenu lot as that!"

"Flesh-pots of Egypt! You'll see whether or not Ada takes to them kindly!" said Aunt Huldah sententiously.

Ada "took to them" at least kindly—"with avidity" might better have expressed the appetite she displayed for the particular flesh-pots opened for her refection.

After the first call on both sides Hedwig hardly appeared in the new friendship, for

which she was strongly disinclined, a friendship which sprang into maturity with such sudden growth that Thackeray's favorite simile for such violent attractions—Jack's beanstalk—was inadequate.

Ada was driving, playing tennis, lunching, picnicking, being petted by the new people in the Belmont house, and Aunt Huldah chuckled, while Hedwig worried.

Ada and she were drifting into changed relations, or rather Hedwig for the first time saw clearly the truth about her younger sister, and suffered keenly in seeing. That Ada could have professed to love Tom Guilford, accept the sacrifice which she must have guessed that her sister had made for her, gain the love of that true heart, and now, so soon, flirt with this honest but stupid young Cræsus, and prove false to her allegiance, was as horrible to Hedwig as it was revolting. Her own love for Guilford—a love that had never waned nor faltered—made her sensitive to wrong done him, and showed her at last her idol as she was.

was going to write, and bid him love me as a sister. Of course I won't accept Bertie until I have got rid of Tom—not formally—but I have told him I'd take him as soon as I was free. And if you don't call that honorable, I'd like to know what is? He isn't very brilliant, but he's a good little fellow, and I've concluded I am designed to grace a rich man's hearth. So this is the last of my experiments; I'll marry Bertie, and if you can make Tom happy you have my blessing."

Hedwig's eyes blazed; the recollection of all the fruitless sacrifices, and the crowning sacrifice of her life, rose up to condemn the heartless girl who jested with her pain. Already the influences of the past eight weeks had made Ada worldly, harder, older, and furnished her with the meretricious cleverness of a world which she had never seen. Aunt Huldah laid her hand on Hedwig's arm, checking the words which she might have spoken and repented later, full of the bitterness of a life-long devotion turned to ashes in her clasp.

"You have my cordial approval, Ada," said Aunt Huldah grimly. "It's the law of nature that everything finds its own level—you're heading straight for yours, and you'll learn a good deal more than you know now before you die."

"You never liked me, Aunt Huldah," said Ada, rising with a shrug. "I fancy I shall get on just as well, however. Bertie is coming over to see you to-night, Hedwig. He's honorable, if you don't think much of his brains. He wants your consent—provisional consent—before I telegraph Tom, because I'm so young. My youth has been considerably in my way, but as a matron it will be all the nicer. I hope you'll be civil to poor Bert; he's the most-in-love thing you ever saw!"

"I think I shall treat him with consideration; he is not to blame for your fickleness. I hope he will not suffer from it later," said Hedwig, in a voice Ada would not have known for hers.

"Don't you worry about Bertie," said Ada with a little toss of the head, as she gathered

"If that is what you have decided upon between you—yes," said Hedwig in a low voice. The rapturous Bertie rushed away to find Ada, and the happy pair walked down to the station to telegraph Guilford.

His reply arrived in the morning. "All right," it ran. "No hard feeling, and good wishes. Shall be glad of further particulars, to which will reply by mail. Cordial greetings to family. Thomas Guilford."

Ada turned the yellow paper over with a dissatisfied face. "What a garrulous telegram!" she said. "And it sounds as though he had thrown up his hat just before he wrote it. How disagreeable he is!"

CHAPTER X

HEDWIG tasted a bewildering joy in giving herself up to the remembrance and thought of Guilford, with no conscientious barrier to that happiness. When she found herself alone, after Bertie and Ada had gone to send him his release by the quickest method, she threw up her arms with a dramatic gesture and drew a long breath—the first, it seemed to her, she had breathed for months. She had fought hard against the love which she had no right to feel for the man who was to be her sister's husband, but now—now, at least for a little while—she might love him as she pleased. Her heart throbbed with the delicious certainty that there was really no clause in that sentence, that she was free to love him forever, for she could not doubt that he would come to her to claim that love. There was little chance

to give herself up to thought of any kind, however; there was no possibility of escaping the festivities going on at the Belmont house, celebrating the new engagement. Every time that she came in contact with Ada's future family Hedwig found them newly disagreeable, and it sickened her to see how readily Ada adopted the smart tone of flippant would-be wit prevailing among them, and, worse, the frankly sordid aims and views of their lives. Bertie was not so bad; he was only foolish, but underneath his folly he was rather an honest little creature, and he evidently revered and loved Ada to the full limit of his capacity.

It was impossible for Hedwig to grieve over her sister's choice as she would once have done. The old habit of affection, the claim of blood held her to Ada sufficiently to make her deeply interested in the future upon which she was determined to enter so soon, but in the profound disgust aroused in Hedwig by Ada's shallow heartlessness in regard to Guilford the old blind devotion of the elder sister for the

younger had been slain beyond all hope of resurrection.

Mrs. Gay-Leavens—Flossie, as Ada now called her—was not so delighted with her brother's choice as her first raptures and subsequent enthusiasm over Ada would have led one to expect. She had spoken truly when she had said that she hoped for his marriage with the rich Chicagoess, and was a trifle disappointed that it had failed. However, she had reasons for desiring Bertie's speedy marriage; and Ada was decidedly pretty, admired her to an extent that promised well for her influence in the future, and best of all, had enough money to make her independent of her husband's purse. "It would do," Flossie said, and was sufficiently content. She had become more truly Ada's sister than Hedwig now; to her the young bride-elect deferred in all things, to her she showed an affectionate admiration which would once have caused Hedwig profound pain. The gulf between the Ainsborough sisters was greater than either realized

when Hedwig could see a stranger, and such a woman as Flossie, usurp her place and be almost indifferent to the sight.

Through the confusion of dinners, dancing, gaiety which she detested, among people who offended her taste at nearly every turn, Hedwig walked as in a dream, the air full of blessed expectancy that brooded in the late summer sunshine, with the beautiful stillness with which nature was filled. Not until after Ada's wedding would Guilford come, she told herself—but then? And for answer her lips and eyes wore a happy smile, while health returned to her, and beauty increased upon her till only a lover as infatuated as Bertie could have called Ada the handsomer of the Ainsborough sisters.

“That high-and-mighty saintly sister of yours, who sincerely despises my slang and general unworthiness, is getting handsomer every minute,” said Flossie to Ada one day. “She really is stunning! It's a good thing for you Bertie is at the callow age when blue eyes and golden hair are fetching—and that he is

not artistic—for Hedwig would take the wind out of your sails, my little lady, if you were pitted against each other for the favor of older and wiser men.” And Ada did not find Flossie’s spicy way of putting things as attractive in this speech as usual.

Ada was to be married in October, the latest time possible for Mrs. Gay-Leavens to stay in Fenford.

“Don’t bother about your trousseau, Ada; take my advice and be married first, and get your things in New York. You can make that your wedding-trip, if you like—to the dress-maker,” said Bertie’s unsentimental sister.

“I don’t understand,” murmured Ada, who could not adjust her inexperienced thoughts to Flossie’s rapid wisdom.

“Why, don’t go away at all, you little goose! Shut yourself up in some hotel—you can’t hide anywhere on earth better than in a great city—and have stunning gowns made on the quiet. Then get one of the Saturday night newspapers to announce your return to town, and

blaze out. You and Bertie can take your wedding-trip just as well in the spring. You'll be fagged out with late hours by that time, and welcome a rest anyway."

"But I thought every one went away, and I'd like to go to Washington, or Niagara, or somewhere," said Ada, divided mentally between this overthrow of her preconceived ideas, and the pleasure contained in Flossie's suggestion of the coming gaieties of her winter.

"You are a country little grain of hayseed!" laughed her future sister-in-law good naturedly. "Every one does precisely what he and she chooses, my dear, and if you are sensible you will wait for clothes till you can get the right sort, and not pose as a love-sick turtle dove. It isn't as though you were madly in love with poor Bertie—as he is with you."

Ada was startled. She had got far enough from her early training to be false to its principles, but not to be ready to hear her motives

called by their true name. She acted on Flossie's advice in the end—as Hedwig felt sure that she would do—and her wedding preparations were to partake of the nature of affairs in Looking-Glass Land; she would be married first, and get her trousseau afterward. Her mother's wedding gown and veil had been saved for her, and Flossie declared it much more "swell" to wear that than to have a new one all her own. So the second Mrs. Ainsborough's heavy white silk and fine veil were brought forth for the little daughter, whom they suited with scarcely any alterations.

"Bertie says he had a letter from New York yesterday, asking him if he had any money to put on a first mortgage," said Ada to Hedwig one day, when her wedding was not quite two weeks off. "Bert says it is gilt-edged security, but he doesn't care about it, because he is satisfied with his investments, though he will sell something, and take it up, if I don't want it. Oh, I'm telling the point of my story first! Bert says I'd better sell my bonds, and put the

money in this mortgage—I'll get six per cent. And I'm going to do it. Bert may not be a Browning, but when it comes to finances he's got sense enough."

"Very well, Ada; I am not competent to form an opinion on the matter, and Bertie will be the one to whom you must trust in the future. I suppose you did not tell me this to get my opinion. I am sure that what you say of Bert's business ability is true. I have nothing to say," said Hedwig.

"I have something to say, however," said Aunt Huldah, looking up from the heavy damask which she was hemming—her present to the bride. "What bonds are those you speak of selling, Ada?"

"My bonds, left me by father," answered Ada, while Hedwig hastily put out her hand, and grasped Aunt Huldah's arm, murmuring: "Please, please, Auntie, don't."

"I certainly shall," said Aunt Huldah, nodding emphatically as she took Hedwig's hand, and patted it affectionately. "There is some-

thing I meant to say to you, Ada, before you went much further, and this brings it about, though I would rather not have had Hedwig hear it. Have you considered how you happen to have those bonds? And do you realize that in her devotedly blind love for you, your sister has made herself poor to spare you the richly deserved consequences of your actions of last year?"

"Aunt Huldah! I beg of you——" cried Hedwig in distress.

"Well, what then?" asked Ada, her cheeks red under the attack.

"This then, and it ought not to be necessary for me to tell you," Aunt Huldah continued remorselessly. "What do you suppose Hedwig is going to live on when you take your part—not your part either, but the part she gave you—out of the income? How is she going to live, if you keep that money?"

"Do you mean, Aunt Huldah, that you want me to return those bonds to Hedwig, and marry without a cent of my own?" demanded Ada.

"That's precisely what I mean," said Aunt Huldah emphatically. "You're marrying a man who has enough for you both, and I honestly believe if he knew the story he'd make you restore Hedwig's money, because he's an honest little chap, though he don't amount to much."

"Oh, I wouldn't let her do it! Ada, I won't have the money," cried Hedwig.

"Well, honestly, Hedwig, I don't believe I have thought before how badly off you will be," said Ada slowly, looking a little troubled. "But I don't see how I can give you that money. You know what Flossie is; she'd despise me, and make it hot for me if I came to Bert without a cent. You knew when you gave it to me how it would leave you, and you didn't intend me to give it back, did you?"

"Never, never!" cried Hedwig.

"What's the use of asking that?" demanded Aunt Huldah sternly. "When did Hedwig ever intend you to do anything for her? She has sacrificed her whole life to you, and loved you, and watched over you, and wouldn't see a

fault in you, until you got so you thought that was just as much the natural order of things as it was to walk on the grass the Lord put underfoot. I told her long ago she'd breed up just the heartless girl you're getting to be—that you *are*, Ada Ainsborough! And, I say again, unselfish women do a heap of harm to others with their self-immolation. If there's one spark of honesty, justice, gratitude in you, you'll give back to your sister the money, for the Lord knows how she's going to get on without it."

Hedwig was sobbing by this time, and Ada looked frightened. "I can't, I tell you; I can't, Aunt Huldah," she said. "I wouldn't marry into that rich family without a cent of my own for the world. You'll get on, won't you, Heddie? I'll send you money sometimes. You see, if I put this out at six per cent I could send you money, and still have more than I get now."

"Of course I shall get on," sobbed Hedwig, trying to stop her tears; the picture her aunt

had drawn of past years seen by the light of recent events only too clearly in their mistaken love had greatly disturbed her. "I shall get on, Ada, and I assure you I had no idea that Aunt Huldah meant to say this to you, and that I do not want the money. Let it all go."

"Hedwig, it is pride now, rather than love, that makes you say that; you are entirely wrong," said Aunt Huldah. "And Ada, if you do allow your love for money, and your rank selfishness to lead you into an act that is legally honest, but morally stealing, you mark my words: you will never have happiness in your gains."

Ada suffered some pangs of conscience in pursuing her plan, but pursued it none the less, telling herself that with the money at the higher rate of interest she would set aside what would have been Hedwig's income at three per cent—half the total of the income from the re-invested bonds—and so, while she gained, her sister should not lose. For, like most of us, Ada juggled with her conscience, promising it,

with little sincerity, to do right later, rather than face the disagreeable necessity of doing right at that moment. Few of us are strong-minded enough to destroy the pleasant image of a better self which we have set up in the shrine of self-esteem.

The wedding-day arrived. It was early in October, and the Fenford hills were glowing with the gorgeous colors of an autumn of unusual splendor.

It was to be a home wedding; Flossie declared that one of the very best points in being sprung from old American stock was that such a homestead as the Ainsboroughs' made a much more dignified setting for the great events of life than any other possibly could make.

Masses of flaming maple, bronze-red oak, golden elm, and vivid sumach branches turned the old house into an eastern palace. Chrysanthemums lifted their plumed heads from every jar and vase that could be collected from the neighborhood; their pungent bitterness was a delightful off-set to the Japanese incense and

the heavy odors of the hothouse plants arriving from the city. Other hothouse plants came from the city also: Julius Seaver, unabashed and prospering, and male and female friends of Bertie and Flossie who raved over the stately old house, the pretty bride, the ancient mahogany, precisely as Mrs. Gay-Leavens had raved when she had first called on the Ainsboroughs—a visit Hedwig wished devoutly had never been made. For now that the hour of parting had come, and little Ada was to be transformed into Mrs. Bertram Springer, something of the old love stirred for her in Hedwig's motherly heart, and she felt sick to relinquish her to the life these people represented, a life striking Hedwig with all the force of its unhealthy standards and aims, because her own life had been lived apart from a world wherein such as these are becoming more and more numerous, and the breath of her lungs had been pure air, blowing from the heights.

Ada seemed light-hearted and gay; she liked Bert—Hedwig hoped she liked him as much as

her nature permitted her to care for any one—and she was childishly delighted at being the center of such an interesting occasion; full of the pride of the fleeting pomp and glory of bridedom.

The pastor of the Congregational church—he who had permanently succeeded Alonzo—did not suffice to marry Ada. Following Mrs. Gay-Leavens' apostolic teaching Ada had developed tendencies to becoming "a church-woman," and the Episcopalian minister from Fenford's neighboring town, "assisted by" Flossie's own pastor in New York, were summoned to perform the ceremony. It was brief in itself—it has already been pointed out that the irrevocable act is quickly done—and Hedwig listened incredulously to the fiat that pronounced them—this young man whose face they had not seen till June and her little Ada—man and wife.

The wedding breakfast followed, an elaborate affair through which Hedwig responded to amiable and facetious speeches with what

she hoped were appropriate replies, and toyed with the delicacies which she could not eat.

Then came the misfitted moments in which the important members of the party were absent making ready for flight. Then the long embrace, in which Hedwig, sobbing, bade farewell to that which she had loved so long, so absorbingly, and in which Ada too was moved by the remembrance of past years of unfailing tenderness and devotion, and resolved to be a better sister in the future than she had been in that past.

Then the swift rush through showers of rice and old shoes, with the heels thoughtfully removed; the slam of a carriage door, a laughing, half-tearful face under its golden hair, smiling, nodding farewell; and a wholly triumphant face, smiling foolishly, leaning forward past the first one to nod also; a crack of a whip, a sound of wheels—and Ada was gone.

When the last of her guests were gone too, and Hedwig was left alone with Aunt Huldah, she stood silently, looking around at the deso-

late remains of the festivities. She was alone, alone to face poverty. For how she was to live, almost impoverished as she was by her loving folly, she had no idea. Yet, she did not fear; she did not even realize the force of the words she was saying to herself, for in her anticipations she felt unutterably rich.

Her money was gone, Ada was gone—but what did it matter? For was not Tom coming to her? Tom, whose love was wealth, and superabounding wealth? And this was hers already, of that she felt certain, and having it she was not destitute, nor alone till he came—and after—Hedwig caught her breath with a half sob of weariness and impatient joy.

“Come to bed, Hedwig,” said practical Aunt Huldah. “You have earned your rest.”

Hedwig as the weeks passed by. Of her little fortune there remained but seven thousand dollars in the bank; her bonds had been sold to meet Ada's notes, and her entire income amounted to two hundred and ten dollars a year, out of which she had to pay her share of the taxes on the old house. She could not live upon this, and she and Aunt Huldah had long discussions of ways and means to add to her slender fortune.

Aunt Huldah begged her to close the house, and move bodily—with "Dec," Midas and all her live stock—up the hill to spend the winter with her, who was at best, as she earnestly assured Hedwig, very lonely and in need of companionship.

But Hedwig implored for a little more time; she said she could not face the necessity of giving up her home. Besides the arrangement Aunt Huldah proposed was but a temporary solution of her difficulties; the winter past, spring would find her in no better condition than the present. She must find a way to earn

the money that she needed, and put herself on a secure basis as soon as possible. The unspoken reason for her strong desire to stay in her old home was that in it she had borne all the joys and sorrows of her life, in it had learned to know and love Tom Guilford. If he came to her—though each day made that coming more improbable—she wished him to find her where he had left her, waiting solitary at her post, the visible symbol of her own constancy. When she quitted the old house it would be when she had first abandoned hope, and after that day had dawned nothing would matter.

The first resource of well-educated young women who are forced to earn money was the one to which Hedwig turned. But she found prejudice stood in her path when she asked her neighbors to intrust their children to her to be taught. With her birthright to Catholicity admitted and never commented upon, Hedwig had nearly forgotten how strong was the latent feeling against its dangers in those with whom

she lived in neighborly kindness and into whose affections she had yearly advanced.

For Hedwig Ainsborough, the daughter of a foreign mother, to be a Catholic was a natural phenomenon, and that inherited error did not prevent her from having integrity, goodness of heart, and many other noble qualities, explainable, probably, by her Ainsborough blood. But this same young woman, desirous of teaching the innocent New England children, was another matter; the trustees of the Fenford school told Hedwig openly that though they would have been delighted to have installed her as its mistress—for there was no chance of getting another teacher so valuable as she—they could not fly in the face of local prejudices to the extent of placing a Catholic over the Fenford youthful mind, even though that Catholic was Miss Ainsborough, with all that included. They knew that in Boston such appointments were made, but Boston was a large city, where politics entered into school appointments; Fenford certainly was not

ready for toleration bordering so closely on indifference.

So Hedwig did not get her school, but the old doctor—who scorned religious intolerance with the most intolerant scorn, and who admired Hedwig prodigiously—asked her to read Italian with his own daughters, and this gave her something toward the maintenance of old “Dec” and Hiram—as intimately connected by habit and affection as the centaur with his own equine body—and toward the wages of Betty, who had cooked for Josiah Ainsborough, and regarded his family as her own.

“Why shouldn’t I do the one thing always in demand, and which I can do well?” asked Hedwig of her aunt suddenly, one day when they had—as usual—been canvassing resources. “Why shouldn’t I make my famous plum puddings, put them up in tins, or bowls—or something, and send them to Boston to be sold? I could easily get an agent there. And I might take orders for cake around here. I am sure to find customers.”

"An Ainsborough turn cook!" exclaimed Aunt Huldah in horror.

"Well, why not? Even an Ainsborough must live, and I believe in doing practical things. You know the trouble is no one is willing to perform in lower parts; every lady fallen on evil days must either write books, paint pictures, or teach something. I would promise not to make the Ainsborough side of the question too prominent—I wouldn't label the puddings: 'Ainsborough's Ain,' for instance," said Hedwig with a gleam of the mischief which had nearly disappeared since she had grown heavy-hearted.

But providence—in the shape of the good doctor once more—intervened to save Aunt Huldah's sense of propriety. A scientist—geologist and chemist—of Germanic build and extraction came to Fenford to study the formation of the rocks in her hills.

He wanted a quiet home wherein his own comfort would be considered, but less than the welfare of his precious specimens, and where

the odors of his emphatic chemicals would be tolerated. Doctor Wellman sent him to Hedwig, who received him gladly, and Professor Ebers was installed in Ada's empty room, with a small room off the library given over to his experiments. The simple soul—who became a great child the moment he dropped his chisel and hammer, or turned from his phials and retorts—was amazingly delighted with the good fortune which had set his wandering feet in such pleasant places, and when he heard Hedwig's Christian name, and learned of her German mother his heart overflowed to her, and he felt that her charms were no longer cause for wonder, but that they were more than ever something for which to be grateful.

Hedwig welcomed the professor at first because he came as a solid—in a double sense—solution of her difficulties. Soon she learned to regard him for his own sake. He was not as old as his portly figure and glasses had made him appear, and he was most kind. In a thousand little ways he made life more endurable to

her, reading to her in the long winter evenings which were closing in, from the poets, and giving the English verse an added richness with his sonorous voice and German accent to which he reverted in emotional passages, although he was not born in the Fatherland.

To her own unbounded surprise Hedwig discovered that she had revealed to his sympathy much of her own history, and she was comforted by his unspoken indignation over Ada's neglect of her, which she would have resented if it had been expressed.

For Ada's resolutions to be a better sister, and to send to Hedwig half of her own doubled income had ended as might have been expected. In the unforeseen expenses of her new life, and the fine feathers she required to fly among such fine birds as she had chosen to flock with, Ada found that her all was less than she needed, and she told herself that later—when these first outlays were over—she would fulfil the promises she had made to herself on Hedwig's behalf.

In the meantime there came a letter from

Ada one day which Hedwig read in silent misery, and which left her so wretched that when Professor Ebers came home he found her looking so ill that he was startled.

“By the way,” Ada wrote, “I went the other day to Guilford’s studio. He is looking well, and working hard. I think he is not breaking his heart over the loss of me, though he ought to. He was painting the portrait of a lady— young, pretty, and awfully stylish. I suspect that she has something to do with the heart not breaking; he treated her in a more lover-like way than he ever had for you and me when we sat for him. I fancy it’s Mrs. Guilford’s portrait—Mrs. G. who is to be, I mean—for he introduced her as Miss Lee. I didn’t take Bertie along, because Bert doesn’t show off as well as his checkbook, and I want Guilford to think I did a lot better than in marrying him—as, indeed, I did. I told him Hedwig had a German professor in tow, and was getting on well. He didn’t say much, but that’s his way. I wish you’d send me one of those

old photographs of my mother; I am going to have a miniature done from it—maybe a family portrait in oils, too. Not by Guilford, though. I have the most stunning dinner gown, etc.”

Aunt Huldah asked to see Ada’s last letter, and Hedwig handed it to her without comment.

“H’m,” said Aunt Huldah, after she had read it, giving Hedwig one of her keen glances over her spectacles. “Ada is getting more and more a fool.”

But she returned to her home to consider, and the result of her meditations was a letter despatched by her that night to Bertie, asking him to come to Fenford to see her on a matter of business, and to come alone, without his wife’s knowledge, if he could manage it. Aunt Huldah had very little faith in Bertie’s ability to act independently of Ada. The following night Professor Ebers came in, and immediately after supper shut himself up in his laboratory to experiment on a theory he had formed. Hedwig sat in the adjoining library,

her hands idly folded in her lap, her eyes staring into the fire, the light of which flickered and played over a face pale from loss of sleep.

Suddenly she was startled by a loud report, and rushed into the next room to find Professor Ebers' sleeves blazing, and the room full of fumes of alcohol, and evil odors. There was no time to think. Following her first instinct Hedwig threw herself on the professor's portly form with such sudden onslaught that he went down before her. Seizing the woolen table cover, and dragging it from beneath the apparatus strewn upon it, she wrapped it around the burning man, smothering the flames by the tightness of its folds, and disregarding her own danger, as well as the pain which made itself felt in her hands and arms in spite of her excitement. The battle, though short, was fierce. The professor, self-possessed in the midst of his great danger, aided Hedwig's efforts by rolling himself face downward upon the floor, and in a few minutes the victory was won, the professor saved.

Hiram ran for Doctor Wellman, not wasting time on saddling old "Dec," and in a short while the doctor was treating the burns of both hero and heroine of the adventure. Professor Ebers was horribly burned in both arms, his face was also burned on one side, and his hair was singed, while the heat on the glass of his spectacles had harmed his eyes. But Hedwig's hands were in a dreadful condition, and only less than the man she had rescued did she need the doctor's ministrations.

Both patients were ordered to their beds, and Aunt Huldah was sent for. She came, and for a few days she and Betty had their hands full nursing. In the meantime Bertie arrived, obedient to Aunt Huldah's summons, and it was in Hedwig's own parlor, not her own, that she received him.

"There is something I wanted to say to you, Bert," she began. "Something I wanted you should know. But first how is Ada, and did you tell her you were coming here?"

"Ada's all right, Aunt Huldah," said

Bertie. "I didn't have to tell her. She's down to Lakewood for a week. She's always on the go, and she gets on fully as well without me as with me."

"Already?" said Aunt Huldah.

"Oh, I'm not complaining of Ada—you don't complain of people you like a lot, and I'm as stuck on Ada as a man can be on his wife. I'd rather see her once in a while than any other girl all the time, and I'd rather have her putting up with me than have any one else clean gone on me," said loyal Bertie hastily. "I couldn't expect a girl with her brains to want me tagging at her heels every minute. Even Flossie finds she's getting too many for her—she can't run her any more. I'm glad of it," added Bertie with venom.

"Well, Bertie, you are a good little fellow—I always said so—and I hope Ada will make you thoroughly happy. Now let me tell you about the business matter I got you down for."

And Aunt Huldah proceeded to tell Bertie of Hedwig's sacrifice for Ada in the matter of

the bonds, of Hedwig's present necessities, and Ada's refusal to return the money because of her unwillingness to go to Bertie empty handed.

Bertie listened in amazement. "Why Ada ought to know I wouldn't care whether she had a red or not!" he cried when Aunt Huldah had ended; he was walking up and down the floor by that time, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets.

"It was nice in Ada to want to be independent and all that, but, good heavens! To think of Hedwig's wanting money when we've got so much, and she's been such a sister to Ada! I'll send down a check for the amount the minute I get back."

"No, Bertie; you can't do that," said Aunt Huldah. "If Hedwig ever gets wind of my having told you she'll send the money back, and never forgive me into the bargain. Ada must restore it, and as if she did it of her own accord; you must manage it somehow."

"You're right; you've got the idea," said

Bertie. "I'll get Ada to return the money, and I'll settle the same sum on Ada. It's a go, Aunt Huldah. For goodness' sake, why didn't you tell me all this at the time we were married? I hope you don't think I'd want to keep Hedwig's money!"

"I don't think anything of you but what is good, Bertie," said Aunt Huldah cordially, for the young fellow's generosity and fidelity were better than cleverness. "Of course I know how you feel about it; if I hadn't known I would never have sent for you."

"Well, it is as good as settled," said Bertie. "I'll get it done just as soon as I can bring Ada to see it as I do—that may not be right away, though. Still, I'll take a stand in this thing—this isn't like giving her her head in trips and millinery and such things. I don't see how Ada came to hold on to it all this time—I suppose she is so young she doesn't take things in but——" And honest Bert stopped, with a worried expression creeping over his face.

"Ada seems to imagine that Hedwig is going to marry the professor whose life she saved," said Aunt Huldah, wisely avoiding trying to solve Bertie's doubts, and thinking with pity that the time could not be long before he was fully awake to the heartlessness of the wife he loved so abjectly. This was the main point she had desired to bring before Bert, but it took some skill to speak of Ada's gossip without giving him a hint of any particular reason for wishing it refuted.

"Isn't she?" asked Bert. "Ada said it would be the very thing for Hedwig, because he was a learned, solid fellow, half German—or whole German—or something like Hedwig's mother."

"There isn't the least danger of your having him for a brother-in-law," said Aunt Huldah.

"If you happen to see Guilford, the artist, you might say so. Just speak of having been down here, and how Hedwig had saved Mr. Ebers' life. Then you may get a chance to add that Hedwig has no idea of marrying him.

Ada writes that she told Guilford some sort of nonsense, and Hedwig would be annoyed at gossip of that sort; you might even go out of your way to contradict it, if you will, Bertie," said Aunt Huldah, congratulating herself on her Machiavellian diplomacy.

But Bert winked an expressive wink. "I'm on," he said promptly. "I'll manage the tip, and Guilford shan't know it is one. I caught on to something Ada dropped once about Guilford preferring Hedwig to her, and it made me more peaceable toward him. I'm awfully fond of Hedwig myself—Ada's husband ought to be—and I'll manage the tip all right, as I told you before. I may not be what you could call brilliant, but I'm not dull enough to spoil a good thing like that."

Bert saw Hedwig for a few moments, and patted her head in quite a fatherly manner in default of being able to take her hand.

"Brace up, Heddie," he said, "and when there're any more professors cremating let some one else save them—you're too valuable

to risk. Ada's down to Lakewood; I thought I'd run down here over night. Yes, thanks; I'd like to come and stay longer when you're better, and I will. You're a trump, Heddie, and I'm proud of you for a sister. Honest, I'm no end fond of you, and I appreciate all you've done for Ada like anything. I wish you'd come to New York and stay till you're sick of it. I'd trot you around to the zoo, and the aquarium, and the museum of art, and the libraries, and all those improving places—Ada says you only like intellectual things. I'm not what you could call an intellectual thing myself, but maybe you would put up with me."

"We'd be the very best sort of chums, Bert dear," said Hedwig warmly, for there was something in the lad's voice—born of his recent knowledge of her poverty borne for Ada, and his own dawning doubt of Ada's love—that went straight to her heart. "Cleverness is not the only thing, not even the best thing; for we never love people for their brains, how-

ever much we admire them for them. Come down as soon as I am better, and we'll have a real brother-and-sisterly time. Good-by, love to Ada, and thank you for coming."

"Good-by; don't forget that visit," said Bert, not saying that Ada was not to know of his. Hedwig was surprised to discover after he had gone that she was less lonely and far happier for that glimpse of the affection of little Bertie Springer.

CHAPTER XII

HEDWIG and the professor made steady progress toward recovery, and in due time met again beside the library hearth. Each was still bandaged, neither had a hand to give the other, but the professor's eyes were full of tears as he gazed at his young hostess, but for whose prompt courage he must surely have died, and Hedwig could not meet him for whom she had risked and suffered so much without emotion.

"Is the pain gone?" asked the professor, his German voice deeper and warmer than ever from the stress of feeling.

"Quite gone, thank you. And you? Are you no longer suffering?" asked Hedwig, looking up into the kind face, still veiled in absorbent cotton on the injured side. He really was a big-hearted, splendid man, she

thought, and she was very glad indeed that his treacherous chemicals had failed in their attempt to rob her of such a trusty friend.

"There is not much pain left, only a twinge now and then, to remind me. I am afraid I am not going to be so beautiful as before, Miss Hedwig; my face is surely scarred," smiled the professor. "I am sorry that I can not place a chair for you; Betty must help us both into our seats until we have hands once again."

Old Betty got them both into their places, and left them. There was silence for a moment, and then Professor Ebers spoke. "If only there were any words in either of our languages in which to thank you, Miss Hedwig! But what can a man say to a woman to whom he owes his life, and who has shown such heroism for his sake!"

"Please don't look at it that way, Mr. Ebers," said Hedwig. "It would have been dreadful to have failed—that is the only thought that haunted me during those first hours of half delirium after the accident. We

won't talk about it—it will be something neither of us can ever forget, and it will make us better friends for the danger shared.” The professor did not reply, and Hedwig kept silent too, knowing that he was struggling with strong emotion, and not wishing to dwell on an hour which it was her one desire to forget.

Hedwig was still weak, and as the minutes were ticked out by the little clock above their heads its voice and the heat of the blazing logs made her sleepy. She slipped away into a half-sleeping, half-waking dream, into confused thoughts of her abiding grief, and she did not hear the professor at first when he spoke again.

“Hedwig—it was my mother’s name—Hedwig, you will not know how dear your companionship has become to me. You say that we shall be better friends for the danger we shared—you will not take this so-dear, so-well-beloved companionship from me, will you?” he was saying.

"No, indeed," cried Hedwig, starting up, and having no idea of what it was he had asked her.

To her unspeakable amazement and terror the professor sprang to his feet, extending his bandaged arms, and crying: "Ach, mein Engel! Ach, mein lieber, liebste Schatz!"

"Why in the wide world are you talking to me like that?" cried Hedwig, not knowing what she was saying, but really thinking that the professor's brain had been injured by the accident, and that they had not told her. "Why? Why? Have you not promised me to marry me? Have you not promised me never in all this world to leave me? Oh, mein liebchen, mein Hedwig, with my mother's name, and the true, beautiful German heart—you can not know how I love you, and how glad, and proud, and grateful I am! Ach, to think I have no arms in which to fold you! But come here to me, my brave Hedwig, for you have no more hands than I have—for my sake."

Hedwig listened to this flood of impassioned

feeling with growing terror. Surely the professor was crazy, or he would not say that she had promised to marry him! "Dear Mr. Ebers," she said gently, "I am afraid that there is a mistake. I have not promised to marry you—when did I say that I would never leave you?"

"But this moment!" cried the professor, aghast in his turn, and thinking as Hedwig had thought, that the fire had affected her reason. "I begged you not to take your beloved companionship from me, and you cried, 'No indeed.' Does that not mean anything in English?"

Hedwig struggled with an hysterical desire to laugh. "Dear friend," she said, "can you forgive me? The truth is that I did not hear what you asked me; I had fallen into a doze, and I cried 'no indeed' as I began to arouse. Then you poured forth your love for me, and I had no idea what had gone before. It is dreadful, but please forgive me—I am not to blame."

The poor professor sank back into his chair, wiping the beads of perspiration from his forehead with the back of his bandaged hand. "Then it was all a dream—coming from a dream?" he asked hoarsely. "You don't love me?" Hedwig shook her head. "Not in the way you want me to," she said. "But I am very fond of you, and I should be as sorry to lose you out of my life as you would be to lose me——"

She stopped short, seeing the expression of his face. "It is not the same," he said, rising. "I could wish you had let me burn up. I will go to my room, and to-morrow if I can manage it I will leave here. I can not see you—I thought you would love me since you risked your life for me." Once more the big 'cello voice broke off abruptly.

Hedwig looked up into the wounded face. How fine, how manly he was! What was this curious thing—love—that she who was so lonely, and, what was more, so fond of this noble man could not give him what he wanted,

but must cling to a memory, desolating both their lives? Weakened by pain and sickness, worn out with the disappointments life thus far had held for her, Hedwig wondered if she could not yield, and find happiness in being loved, and in comforting another.

The professor saw the hunger in her eyes, and bent over her as kindly as if she were a child, all thought of himself for the time laid aside.

"Poor little Hedwig!" he said. "It was wrong to bother you now! Never mind me, dear; perhaps by and by you will feel differently. But I will go away just the same, and when you are better I will come back." He laid his wounded hands lightly on her head, and she heard him murmur Heine's exquisite lines:

"Betend, das Gott dich erhalte
So rein und schön und hold."

The next day the professor went away. Hedwig watched him with tears in her eyes; he left her lonely; she found that she had really grown fond of him, and—it was impossible to

forget among other, higher considerations—that with him went a great part of her income. Aunt Huldah did not come to her that night as Hedwig had hoped she might, so she sat alone before her hearth, thinking sad thoughts, her hands in their cotton wrappings laid in her lap, her eyes looking into the fire. Many a woman had struck her colors and abandoned her ideals under like circumstances, capitulating to the necessity of love and to loneliness. Hedwig wondered if she were to be one of these; if the real affection she bore the professor were going to make her give up the love she now believed to be hopeless, and if she would be driven by weakness and trouble into the safe refuge opened to her. Half she thought that it might be so; there was not much use in struggling on alone, not much use in anything earthly, she thought tearfully; and the good professor loved her.

The silence of the room grew oppressive, penetrating at last the absorption of Hedwig's melancholy. People who were much alone be-

came full of fancies, saw what was not visible, heard what was not audible. Hedwig sometimes thought that she heard voices calling her name, especially since she had been recovering from her injuries, and was weak and feverish. That was why it seemed to her that some one said: "Hedwig!" low and huskily; she did not turn her head to look. That the voice reminded her of Guilford's was natural; she wondered if she could bear to be always thus: alone, hearing the echo of his voice in solitude.

But it was not usual for her to fancy she heard a step, some one rustling the portière, and rapid breathing, like that of one who had been running. "Hedwig!" Ah, there it was again, but this time nearer and clearer! She raised herself, resting her elbows on the arms of her chair, and turned her head. Then all the room rang with her cry: "Tom, Tom!" And she took a tottering step toward the figure that she did not know for living man or an apparition.

But it was no apparition! Ghosts do not

leap forward, catching those who are about to fall in strong, warm arms! Ghosts do not rain kisses on cold lips and closing eyes, murmuring mad, glad, incoherent words the while!

"Oh, where have you been?" sighed Hedwig faintly as she lay on the arm supporting her, and looked with incredulous eyes at the face for which they had hungered.

"Dearest, faithfulest, sweetest Hedwig," said Guilford. "I had no idea I was behaving so badly to you. After Ada threw me over—and words can't express how glad I was—I waited for a decent time, or until she was married, before coming to woo you. I couldn't be sure you would forgive me for apparently preferring her to you, and being false to the love I knew you understood in me. Then I waited a little longer till I should know how a big chance I hoped to get would turn out; I wanted to come to you with something really worth offering. And I've got it, Hedwig; I've got a chance that bigger men than I might envy me! But you don't care for that

now, you blessed, unworldly Hedwig! Then at last, just when I was nearly ready to start for Fenford, came Ada to my studio in all her new splendor, and told me you were going to marry the German. That settled it; I had lost you, and I stayed where I was, cursing my delay and my own folly. And then that old trump of an aunt of yours took a hand in the game—she has stood my friend all along in a way I can never repay and prevented me completing the wreck of my life and yours. She sent that little brother-in-law of yours to see me, and he let drop a hint of your solitary state, and made me understand that there weren't to be any international alliances in your administration. Then I didn't waste any more time making a fool of myself; I started, and here I am—and here you are, thank God!" And Tom held Hedwig closer to emphasize his closing remark.

It is more than doubtful if Hedwig understood then very much of this explanation, delivered breathlessly, but there was no need of

understanding more than that Tom was here; Tom's arm supporting her, Tom, loving her with all and more of the love of which she had dreamed.

He placed her tenderly in her chair at last, and knelt beside her, a hand on each shoulder, looking into the soft brown eyes which refused to turn from him, as if she feared he would vanish away into the darkness again. Thus Aunt Huldah found them, when, after a time, she drove down to get a peep at her beloved niece's joy, for which she had hoped, prayed, and schemed.

Tom drove over to see Hedwig's old director the next day—she could not rest until he, whose fatherly kindness had taught her how to bear her trials, should know of her happiness. He was an old man, and he was indulging in his one weakness—his deeply colored meerschaum—when Tom arrived.

"So you're Guilford, the artist," he said, removing the pipe, and scanning Tom from head to toe with whimsical kindliness. "What is

there about you, young man, to upset such a solid girl as my Hedwig? You have just the usual number of arms, legs, eyes, and other appendages. Why, in the name of all that is wonderful, couldn't she be happy without you? Queer thing, queer thing this falling in love! Now if you had been a pipe—ah, that would be different! A pipe has individuality, is irreplaceable—but a young man! You're all alike!"

"You take the same view of it as Kipling, sir," said Tom, much amused. "He said there were plenty of girls, but a good smoke was a good smoke."

"Did he? I didn't know he said anything so wise. I don't know your Kipling; I don't know any of your modern writers. I never read any novelist more recent than Dickens," said the old priest. "Yes; tell Hedwig I'll be glad to come over to supper, and witness her happiness. I have seen her bearing trouble well. She's one of a thousand, that Hedwig of ours; I hope you appreciate her."

"I doubt if any man ever appreciates a noble, unselfish woman like Hedwig, sir, but I have glimmerings of perception of her worth," said Guilford seriously.

"That's the proper attitude; you are on the way to deserving her. I am glad you have come," said the priest. "By the way, if I marry you to Hedwig what about the promises? I can't marry you unless you give your word to allow your children to be brought up Catholics."

"There won't be any trouble about that, sir," said Guilford. "My mind is a blank as to religious teachings, and I'm open to conviction. As to children—if I were so happy as to have children—I not only would be willing they should be Catholics, but if your Church is responsible for Hedwig I wouldn't allow them to be taught any religion but hers."

"That's good," said the priest, shaking hands heartily. "Hedwig will probably stamp that blank mind of yours with the sign of the cross. You're not a bad sort of chap; tell Hedwig I

said so, and give her my blessing. Still, it would be more easy to understand an infatuation for a fine meerschaum. Good-by; I'll come to supper. God bless you both."

When Bertie Springer received the news of Hedwig's engagement he wrote Aunt Huldah a long letter. "Ada doesn't take to the notion of giving back that money," he said. "I can't get her to do it, though I tell her I'll settle the same amount on her for her own use. She argues that the money I would give her we have already, while the other is a gain. Of course there's no getting around that fact, but I don't see how she can want the old stuff, when it ought to be Hedwig's. I guess Ada and I see differently often; maybe women are that way, for Flossie looks at things just as Ada does. Still, there's Hedwig—oh, I guess there are all kinds of men and women, only the right kind of women is scarcer than I used to think it was when I was a kid. Well, what I started to write was that I've got Ada to say she'll make over to Hedwig her share in the old

house, and unless Hedwig will let me pay her back the money—and I'd jump at the chance to do it—I guess we'll have to be satisfied with that. Give my love to Hedwig, and tell Guilford he's the luckiest man afloat. Yours affectionately, Bert Springer."

When Guilford heard of Bertie's offer he agreed with Hedwig that it was out of the question even to consider it, but he was no less pleased than Hedwig with the young fellow's honor and generosity. Accepting her share of the house from Ada was an entirely different matter, and Hedwig gladly acceded to what she assumed to be her sister's sincere offer. Whether it was sincere or not Ada was forced to abide by it, and the old Ainsborough house passed entirely into the hands of its elder daughter.

Guilford was to take the summer dining-room, with its clear northern light from the big double window, for his studio, and there carry out the plans which were to place him among the few fortunate ones of his craft. Hedwig

There was a simple breakfast afterward, and then the guests withdrew, and Aunt Huldah and Bertie stayed till later, talking quietly with the bridal pair. It was like a peculiarly sweet and peaceful Sunday, and Bert, who had never tasted the joys of home life, nor known unworldly women, found himself turning away to hide the tears which would come as he remembered his home which was no home, and the unwelcome little life that had begun and ended too soon.

Late in the day Bert took the train for New York, and Aunt Huldah climbed into her venerable carriage to go home. Tom and Hedwig stood on the broad door-stone to see her off; they were to take no wedding journey, but begin their life at once where they hoped to end it. Tom's arm held Hedwig fast, and she looked up at him with utter trust and peaceful happiness after she had given Aunt Huldah a long, clinging kiss, and the old lady had taken up the reins, and started rejoicing down the driveway.

She looked back at the turn. Tom still held his wife close, and she still smiled into his eyes. The long rays of the June sunshine made spun-out shadows of the elms upon the grass, the air was sweet with vague hints of unseen beauty of tree and flower and sod. Midas rubbed his arching back against his mistress and his new master. The whole picture was full of present joy, and secure promise of the future.

"Thank God, Hedwig's got her deserts at last," said Aunt Huldah aloud as she hastily steered white Dobbin off the boulder marking the driveway entrance, and which the tears of joy filling her eyes had prevented her seeing before.

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